

## **MPhil in Intercultural Communication**

**Language errors in the use of English by two different  
dialect groups of Afrikaans first language-speakers  
employed by Nedbank: An analysis and possible remedy**

**by**



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## Abstract

The financial sector of South Africa is increasingly under pressure to ensure that the language used in all communication is aligned with international best practice and, furthermore, that the correct business terminology is applied.

Standards of language proficiency and usage have, however, deteriorated over the past few years. This appears to be due mainly to lack of good language education at school level. In Nedbank, specifically, the language used by employees in written external communication is not always on par as is evident from the documentation that *Nedbank Editorial and Language Services* (Nels), the “language custodian” of the bank, has to edit and translate. Nels decided six years ago that, instead of rewriting all these documents, which is not time- or cost-efficient, to rather give business-writing training across the bank to enable Nedbank employees to increase their general writing proficiency of English. This study aims to establish whether there are discrepancies in the type of error made in English as used by Coloured Afrikaans mother tongue speakers and White Afrikaans mother tongue speakers in order to determine how to customise the business-writing training materials to the benefit of each cultural grouping in Nedbank.

## Abstrak

Die finansiële sektor in Suid-Afrika is toenemend onder druk om te verseker dat die taal wat in alle kommunikasie gebruik word in ooreenstemming is met internasionale “beste praktyk”, en verder dat die korrekte besigheids-terminologie gebruik word. Taalvaardigheids- en taalgebruiksvlakke het egter oor die afgelope aantal jare verswak, waarskynlik a.g.v. onvoldoende taalonderrig op skool. In Nedbank is die taalgebruik van werknemers in geskrewe eksterne kommunikasie nie altyd van ’n aanvaarbare standaard nie, soos duidelik blyk uit die dokumentasie wat *Nedbank Editorial and Language Services* (Nels), die bank se “taalbewaarder”, moet redigeer en vertaal. Nels het ses jaar gelede besluit om besigheidskryfkursusse vir die hele groep aan te bied, eerder as om al die eksterne kommunikasie oor te skryf, wat nie tyd- en koste-effektief is nie. Sodoende kan werknemers hulle algemene skryfvaardighede in Engels verbeter. Hierdie studie probeer vasstel of daar moontlike verskille is in die soort foute wat in Engels deur gekleurde Afrikaans-moedertaalsprekers en wit Afrikaans-moedertaalsprekers gemaak word, in ’n poging om doeltreffende opleidingsmateriaal te ontwikkel vir elke kulturele groepering in Nedbank.

**Declaration of authenticity**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own, original work and that it has not been published or presented in any other form up to date.

**Dedication**

I dedicate this study to my family for their patience, while I was once again busy with research activities.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Mr Johan Oosthuizen, as well as Professor Christine Anthonissen and Christine Smit of the Department of General Linguistics, for assisting me on various levels during the past three years.

**Dr Wena Coetzee**

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and General Background**

### **1.1 Nedbank and Nedbank Editorial and Language Services**

Nedbank Group Limited ("Nedbank Group") is a bank holding company that operates as one of the four largest banking groups in South Africa through its principal banking subsidiaries, Nedbank Limited and Imperial Bank Limited, in which Nedbank has a 50,1% interest. The company's ordinary shares have been listed on the JSE Limited since 1969.

Nedbank Group offers a wide range of wholesale and retail banking services through three main business clusters, namely Nedbank Corporate, Nedbank Capital and Nedbank Retail. After significant growth over the last few years Nedbank Business Banking was separated from the Nedbank Corporate business cluster to form a fourth business cluster from January 2009. Nedbank Group focuses on southern Africa, with the group positioned as a bank for all – from both a retail and a wholesale banking perspective.

Nedbank Group's headquarters are in Sandton, with large operational centres in Durban and Cape Town, which are complemented by a regional network throughout South Africa and facilities in other southern African countries. These facilities are operated through Nedbank Group's 10 subsidiary and/or affiliated banks, as well as through branches and representative offices in certain key global financial centres that serve to meet the international banking requirements of the group's South African-based multinational clients.

Nedbank Editorial and Language Services (NELS) is based at Nedbank Head Office in Sandown, Johannesburg. It was established in 1984 with the main objective of performing a regulatory editing and translation function of all external communication produced by the bank. A huge amount of risk is involved in any communication produced and distributed by the bank as ambiguous or unclear language can result in legal claims against the bank, which in turn can result in financial loss for the bank.



NELS consists of ten fulltime editors and editorial assistants whose day-to-day functions include the editing and proofreading of all documentation for external use as well as doing translations from English to Afrikaans or vice versa; and from English to five of the other official languages of South Africa, namely isiZulu, Sesotho, Tshivenda, Setswana and Sepedi.

## **1.2 Business Writing courses presented internally by NELS**

In 2004, NELS also started presenting business writing courses to Nedbank employees because it became clear, especially in recent years, that the quality of English language usage in written documents by Nedbank employees has deteriorated to such an extent that the workload on NELS has doubled. A disconcerting percentage of the documentation had to be rewritten as a large amount of it was far below par, which posed a reputational risk to the bank.

At first, only a Better Business Writing course was presented, which was focused on Nedbank's inhouse style, rather than basic language usage elements. It became clear, however, that many Nedbank employees needed an even more basic course than that, a course that covered basic language communication elements like tenses, prepositional usage, sentence manipulations, writing of emails, letters, etc.

The writer was tasked to devise such a course and the first one was presented in March 2007. There was such a demand for the course that it soon afterwards had to be presented on a monthly basis all across South Africa. It also became clear that the participants were culturally and linguistically so diverse that certain adaptations to the course would have to be made to cater for different proficiency levels and language and cultural backgrounds.

Nedbank has an existing language policy (see chapter 3) and if the writing of some of our internal clients is measured against this, it is evident that the

language usage is not adequate. Therefore, much more intensive and focused language training of Nedbank employees needs to be done.

As South Africa has a very diverse linguistic landscape with 11 official languages, each with numerous varieties, a decision had to be taken where to start with the customisation of the courses. It was decided that as a starting point for the adaptation of the current training materials, an error analysis (see 3.4) had to be done of the language usage of English L2 speakers whose mother tongue is Afrikaans, but who are from two different dialect groups, namely White Afrikaans and Coloured Afrikaans. This choice was mainly determined by two facts: firstly, that the researcher belongs to one of the two language groups, and secondly because eight courses are presented in the Western Cape every year, which is the highest number for the away-venues, and 90 percent of the delegates on these courses are from these two language groups

The aim of the error analysis is to establish the types of language usage errors of both groups, the commonalities and the differences regarding these errors, and how these can be addressed by the training materials.

The error analysis is done with respect to a pre-assessment (see 3.3) completed by the training delegates at the beginning of the course. The pre-assessment includes questions on all language items covered by the course, the mastering of which is essential for clear communication in the environment of a financial institution. A number of inhouse style items, which are specifically relevant to Nedbank, have also been included to ascertain the level of consistency of usage by Nedbank employees across the country.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

NELS has an existing suite of Business Writing courses presented to employees but they are such a diverse group in terms of language proficiency, mother tongues, and the nature of the language usage errors that

the training is too generic and not focused enough to remedy any specific errors.

From a linguistic perspective, the problem for the language trainer is how to accommodate such diverse groups in a single training session by adapting and diversifying the content to such an extent that everybody will learn something applicable to their own usage errors.

## **1.4 Research questions and hypothesis**

The two general research questions addressed in this study can be formulated as follows:

- (i) What is the nature of language usage errors made by White Afrikaans L1-speakers of English and Coloured Afrikaans L1-speakers of English as they are manifested during the language courses presented by NELS?,
- (ii) How can the training materials be adapted to remedy these errors?

In addressing these questions, the hypothesis is that for the two cultural groups examined in this study, the usage variation of English should not be very big as they have a common mother tongue. However, any specific discrepancies should be identified and the focus of the training materials should be adjusted accordingly.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed discussion of the relevant aspects of intercultural communication, language diversity in South Africa, with specific reference to the so-called “white” Afrikaans compared to “coloured” Afrikaans, error analysis theory and second language acquisition.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical background**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Chapter 2 deals with several theoretical aspects that played a part in this study; more specifically, aspects relating to models of intercultural communication, error analysis, language diversity in South Africa with specific reference to the distinction between 'white' Afrikaans and 'coloured' Afrikaans, and to second language acquisition.. A discussion of these aspects serves as background to the eventual error analysis of the participating employees' assessments, and recommendations on how to adapt the learning materials to accommodate the differences in language usage and how to remedy the different types of errors made by the two cultural groups in question.

### **2.2 Intercultural communication**

#### **2.2.1 Defining culture**

The first notion of culture emerged in the German and English Romantic movements (Thornton 2000: 37). According to this notion, each nation or national language possessed its own special character, flavour or spirit that summed up the experience and history of a people. However, 'culture' as an analytically useful category did not emerge until 1873 when Tylor (in Thornton 2000: 37) fused the different notions of culture and civilisation into his definition of it being the collection of customs, traditions, unwritten laws and ways of life of all of humanity in its many cultural variants.

Definitions of culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century include that of Ronowicz (1999: 5) who states that culture in its broadest sense can be understood as a comprehensive view of history. This includes politics, economics, social history, philosophy, science, technology, education, the arts, religion and customs.

### **2.2.2 Defining intercultural communication**

Gudykunst (2003: 163) defines intercultural communication as “communication between people from different national cultures”. He further states that intercultural communication is but one type of inter-group communication, i.e. communication between members of different social groups.

Samovar and Porter (1985) define intercultural communication as occurring whenever a message producer is a member of one culture and a message receiver is a member of another. And Collier and Thomas (1988), define intercultural communication as contact between persons who identify themselves as distinct from one another in cultural terms.

These three varied definitions of intercultural communication give only a small glimpse of a range of disagreements in the field of intercultural communication research. For the purposes of this study, and placed specifically within the South African context, intercultural communication is defined as any form of communication that takes place between people of different cultures. Although the two groups in question in this study has the same mother tongue (or varieties of the same mother tongue), there are very distinct cultural differences.

### **2.2.3 Models of cultural differences**

For the purposes of this study, a basic distinction is made between dimensional models of intercultural communication and communication models. The core concepts and assumptions of these models are set out in the subsections below.

### **2.2.3.1 Dimensional models**

#### **(a) Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) model for analysing cultural values**

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) model defines five dimensions of cultural assumptions, namely people's relationship to the environment, to each other, to activity, to time and to the basic nature of human beings (Bennett 1998:23). Each dimension is a continuum of possible relationships that people might assume with the subject.

Bennett (1998:23) uses the following example to illustrate the way a cultural value is established: "people may assume that they can control the environment, that they can live in harmony with it, or that they are subjugated by the environment." The model allows for all positions to be represented to some degree in all cultures, but claims that one position will be preferred. This general preference constitutes a cultural value.

#### **(b) Hofstede's (1981) Dimensional Model**

Hofstede (1981) initially identified four dimensions of cultural difference, namely Power Distance, Masculinity, Individualism–Collectivism, and Uncertainty Avoidance. In later studies (Guirdham 1999: 52), he also added the dimension of Confucian Dynamism or Long-term Orientation. In analysing data from various national cultures, Hofstede (1981) ranked these cultures in terms of each dimension. By statistically combining factors, Hofstede was able to map clusters of cultures in several dimensions. These dimensional categories, which are widely used in many contemporary studies of cultural values, are briefly described below.

##### **(i) Power distance**

According to Guirdham (1995:53), power distance (PD) "is defined by the degree of separation between people of various social statuses or ... the extent to which the less powerful members of a society expect and accept that power is distributed unequally."

The relationships between unequals are very formal in high-PD societies; the flow of communication is formalised and restricted and companies are typically structured in rigid vertical hierarchies. In contrast to this, relations in low-PD societies are open and informal. The flow of communication is pragmatic and without restriction. Companies tend to have flat structures and matrix organisations. White Afrikaans mother tongue speakers in South Africa tend to belong to high PD-societies, where the flow of communication between unequals is often more formal than with Coloured Afrikaans mother tongue speakers. A possible reason could be the very hierarchical structure on social and business level of White Afrikaans mother tongue speakers, which is still a remnant of Apartheid's very fixed business hierarchies.

**(ii) Individualism – Collectivism**

Individualism incorporates the assumption of self-reliance (Bennett 1998:24) and self-sufficiency (Guirdham 1999:52). Collectivism, in contrast, recognises interdependency of roles and obligations to the group. Generally, White Afrikaans speakers are perceived to have higher self-reliance than Coloured Afrikaans speakers.

**(iii) Masculinity/Femininity**

The Masculinity/Femininity (MAS) dimension concerns quality-of-life issues. If a society has a high MAS culture, it will endorse assertiveness, competition and aggressive success. Low MAS cultures like that associated with the Japanese prefer modesty, compromise and cooperative success. Material and financial achievements are also rewarded with preferential social prestige and status (Guirdham 1999:54). American culture is a good example of a high MAS culture. Similarly, the White Afrikaner male is generally perceived to belong to a high MAS culture and to be extremely competitive, much more so than the Coloured Afrikaans speaker.

**(iv) Uncertainty avoidance**

Uncertainty concerns the value placed on risk and ambiguity in a culture. According to Bennett (1998:24) uncertainty avoidance (UA) expresses the assumption of intolerance of ambiguity. This is endorsed by Guirdham

(1999:54) who also states that high UA cultures prefer rules and set procedures to contain uncertainty, whereas low UA cultures tolerate greater ambiguity and prefer more flexibility in their responses.

Examples of high UA cultures are those associated with Greece, Portugal and South American countries like Peru, Argentine and Chile. Cultures lowest in UA and most tolerant of ambiguity are those associated with Singapore, the United States, England, and the Scandinavian and South Asian countries.

### **(b) Criticism of the dimensional approach**

The main criticism lodged against Hofstede's model is that his range of cultures is limited by his data, which do not include Eastern European groups apart from the Yugoslavs (Clyne 1994:30). The reason for this is that the company he used in his study, namely IBM, did not at the time operate in Eastern European countries. African cultures were also not considered.

Clyne (1994:9) states that the notion of the national culture is useful but also questionable. He cites the Germans as an example: after unification they demonstrated much higher collectivity and uncertainty avoidance in the east than in the west. The question arises whether one can really talk of a national culture, as there are so many variables within a country like gender, class, race, group age, political affiliation, and religion.

### **2.2.3.2 Communication models**

Two of the most influential proponents of communication-based models of cultural difference are Hall and Collier. The core assumptions and concepts of their respective models are briefly described below.

#### **(a) The high-context – low-context culture theory of Hall (1976)**

Hall (in Guirdham 1999:60) defines high-context as a communication style in which most of the information is already in the person (for example, body language), while very little is in the coded, explicitly transmitted part of the message. This applies to cultures which stress analogic communication (such



as the one associated with the Japanese), whose speakers imply and infer meaning conveyed by means of relatively vague utterances from the context of relatively vague statements. This is in contrast to cultures, such as the one associated with the United States, which use low-context communication where most of the information is contained in the explicit linguistic code (Bennett 1998:17). This type of communication is also known as "digital communication". A general perception of White Afrikaans speakers is that they tend to over-explain themselves, often as a result of their perception that the receiver of their message is not as quick-witted as they are. It would thus appear that White Afrikaans mother tongue speakers have a low-context culture.

In high-context cultures, people adopt a role-orientated style, which emphasises the social roles that the participants hold and different scripts are used depending on role relationships. Work meetings in Eastern countries, for example, are very formal by Western standards. By contrast, people in low-context cultures are very formal by Western standards. People in these cultures use a personal style which emphasises personal identity over social position. Because role relationships and status differences are less important, communication is less formal and often more intimate (Guirdham 1999:61).

#### **(b) The cultural identity theory of Collier (2003)**

Within Collier's (2003) approach, communication and culture are intertwined. Culture is defined as a historically transmitted system of symbols, meanings and norms. Reference symbols and meanings define what groups of people say, do, think and feel; it is not the people but the communication that links them together. Core symbols are very important as illustrated by Collier's example from a collectivistic culture such as the one associated with Mexico: this culture has bondedness as a core symbol, compared to mainstream culture in the USA, in which personal accomplishment represents a core symbol. In South Africa White Afrikaans speakers are generally perceived to have an urge to accomplish as much as possible personally; also, families are usually not extended, with the immediate family setup (mother, father and children) often considered as the only family one needs.

Collier (2003:414) distinguishes between different approaches to culture, namely culture as place, as ancestry and people, as art and artefact, as capital, as product, as politics and ideology, as psychology, as worldview, as style of thinking and speaking, as performance, and as group identity. She also elaborates on several principles of cultural identities, for example multiple cultural identity types, which imply that one person may have different cultural identities depending on the different groups he/she belongs to (national and ethnic cultures; professions; geographic area; corporation; physical ability or disability). Cultural differences within the Coloured Afrikaans-speaking group abound. At least superficially, members of the Cape Coloured group tend to be more bound to their cultural traditions, for example certain religious festivals that are strictly adhered to and the Cape Carnival where the "Kaapse Klopse" display their musicality and rhythms. As a group, Gauteng Coloureds are apparently not so strongly rooted to age-old traditions.

In Collier's framework, the terms "salience" and "intensity differences" are used to describe the phenomenon that one or more particular identities may feature more strongly than others at a specific point. She furthermore uses the terms "avowal" and "ascription processes" for referring to, respectively, what an individual portrays to others and when an individual comes to know that others attribute particular identities to them as members of a group (Collier 2003:420).

Collier (2003: 421) claims that cultural properties are both enduring and changing. All cultures have specific histories but can also change because of economic, political, social, psychological, and contextual factors. The Cape Coloured group is a good example of this, with its gradual move to English as a preferred language.

### **2.2.3.3 Comparing dimensional models and communication models of cultural difference**

The main difference between the approach of the dimensional model and the communication-based models to cultural differences concerns the dimensional model's emphasis on a number of dimensions of culture, purporting to reflect underlying values (Guirdham 1999:59), whereas the communication-based models place communication at the centre of cultural differentiation (Guirdham 1999:60). Hofstede and Trompenaars focus on describing culture in terms of interaction between value systems (Guirdham 1999:51-52), whereas the communication theorists focus on culture from the perspective of communicative interaction between individuals and groups.

Dimensional theories view language and communication primarily as a mechanism for transmitting culture. Furthermore, advocates of this approach have developed models that describe national culture. The communication theorists and specifically the cultural identity theorists, however, believe that national culture is only one type among many.

Increasing levels of global social consciousness tend to nurture the formation of subcultures and to promote multiculturalism. However, this may not be the case for the national cultures emphasised by the dimensional models. Dimensional models predict continuing cultural difference because they incorporate the view that one is born into one specific (national) culture. Communication models, by contrast, predict cultural convergence: since culture is created, negotiated and changed through communication, increased intercultural communication (due to globalisation) should lead to increased cultural similarities (Guirdham 1999:52).

### **2.2.3.4 Conclusion**

Despite all the criticism against the dimensional models, Guirdham (1999:59) still acknowledges the fact that their workability means that they have been widely and productively applied to understanding intercultural encounters of

all kinds. Although there is a great difference in focus between dimensional models and communication theories, it is clear that there is room for both of them when exploring cultural differences and intercultural communication.

In this study, communication-based models will be taken as a starting point to explore how the mother tongue (Afrikaans) manifests itself in the type of language errors that are made by English L2 speakers.

## **2.3 Error analysis theory**

### **2.3.1 The notion of 'error'**

The term "error" is used in this study to refer to systematic errors made by the learner of a second (or further) language from which we are able to reconstruct his knowledge of that language to date, that is, as Ellis (1997: 144) coins it, his "transitional constructions". A learner's errors provide evidence of his knowledge of the language he is using at a particular point. He has some system, although it is not yet the right system.

Corder (1981: 67) uses the term "transitional competence" for referring to the knowledge that the learner of a given language should possess: "a certain body of knowledge which we hope is constantly developing (and) which underlies the utterances he makes". Although the learner may be able to communicate a message in such a way that the receiver understands his intention, it may be erroneous and not acceptable on all levels of communication.

A learner's errors can be significant in three ways:

- It tells the trainer how far towards the target language the learner has progressed and what remains for him to learn.
- It provides evidence to the researcher of how language is learnt, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his mastering of the language.

- Most importantly, it gives information to the learner himself: by analysing the errors he/she has made, the learner will learn not to make the same errors again.

Corder (1973: 265) holds a similar view on the significance of errors, stating that errors provide feedback, serve as a diagnostic regarding the effectiveness of teaching materials and teaching techniques, and can be used to identify those parts of the syllabus which have been inadequately learned or taught and need further attention. Errors also enable the teacher to decide whether he can move on to the next item in the syllabus or whether he must devote more time to the item he has been working on.

### **2.3.2 The purpose of an error analysis**

Corder (1973:257) argues that while the nature and quality of mistakes a learner makes, does not provide a direct measure of his actual knowledge of the language, it is probably the most important source of information about the nature of his knowledge at that point in his learning process. We can get a better picture of those language items that are causing the learner problems. Error analysis, therefore, provides a check on the predictions of bilingual comparisons, and inasmuch as it does this, it is an important source of information for the selection of items to be incorporated into the syllabus.

As noted above, Corder (1973: 265) states that errors provide feedback to both the teacher and the learner. They tell the teacher something about the effectiveness of his teaching materials and his teaching techniques, and show him what parts of the syllabus have been inadequately learned and need further attention. This is the day-to-day value of errors. But in terms of broader planning and with a new group of learners, they provide the information for designing a remedial syllabus or a programme of re-training.

### **2.3.3 Different approaches to determining the nature of language errors**

It is essential to the value of this research to give attention to the most influential approaches to determining the nature of language errors. Two of these approaches, contrastive analysis and error analysis, are described in the subsections below.

#### **2.3.3.1 Contrastive analysis**

Contrastive analysis is an essential tool to compare or contrast the mother tongue and the target language of a learner and to determine to what extent errors are due to mother tongue interference.

Skinner (1957:8) states: "If language is essentially a set of habits, then when we learn a new set of habits, the old ones will interfere with the new ones." In short, mother tongue interference is to be expected, for example, when learning English as a second language in any context.

Ellis (1997:51) points out that mother tongue interference need not always be seen as negative transfer because in some cases the learner's mother tongue can facilitate second language acquisition. This is called "positive transfer".

Norrish (1983:29) states that the contrastive analysis method can be very useful to teachers of English as a second language as most of them will have a sufficient knowledge of the learner's mother tongue to identify the root cause of an error. The teacher will be able to point out to the learner that while it is acceptable to say something in a specific way in the mother tongue, it is not equally acceptable in the target language because of a specific reason.

However, contrastive analysis on its own is not sufficient to account for all errors made by second language speakers.

In its strongest formulation, the contrastive analysis hypothesis claimed that all the errors made in learning the L2 could be attributed to "interference" by

the L1. However, this claim could not be sustained by empirical evidence that was accumulated in the mid- and late 1970s. It was pointed out that many errors predicted by contrastive analysis were inexplicably not observed in learners' language. Even more confusingly, some uniform errors were made by learners irrespective of their L1. It thus became clear that contrastive analysis could not predict learning difficulties, and was only useful in the retrospective explanation of errors. These findings, along with the decline of the behaviourist and structuralist paradigms considerably weakened the appeal of contrastive analysis.

Ellis (1997:52) suggests that contrastive analysis should be combined with another type of analysis, namely error analysis, to determine what the underlying causes of a L2 learner's errors are.

### **2.3.3.2 Error analysis**

Error analysis involves the description of all errors, whether they are caused by mother tongue interference or not. Error analysis is used by both researchers and teachers to identify, classify and evaluate errors made by learners, and can provide useful information on both a practical and theoretical level. For example, it helps to develop an understanding of the nature of an error, thereby aiding curriculum researchers in identifying which parts of the target language students have the most problems with and which error types detract most from the learner's ability to communicate effectively. Error analysis also provides the trainer with information regarding the type of difficulty that learners are experiencing at a specific point in a course, which can assist with the drawing up of a course curriculum.

Error analysis is also a useful tool to the learners. By identifying the nature of the error that they make, they are sensitised to the fact that the specific structure or word is not acceptable in the target language, which could be a preventative measure in terms of future errors. The motto "learners learn from their mistakes and the correction of their mistakes" is very appropriate.

An error analysis may be used effectively to help identify the present level of proficiency or lack of proficiency of learners of a second language so that remedial measures can be designed that are tailored to the specific needs of the learners. Corder (1973:269) suggests that through paying attention to learners' errors, we might come to a better understanding of the learners' needs and stop assuming that we know exactly how language learning courses should be structured.

Corder also suggests that the key to error analysis is the systematic nature of language and consequently of errors. According to him (1973:270), errors fall into two groups: those that are systematic and those that are unpredictable. However, this classification is not adequate because the instability of the interlanguage (see 2.3.3.4) makes it impossible to predict what error the learner will make next. On the one hand, a learner makes systematic errors in a particular area for a limited time. He passes through a stage at which he sometimes gets a construction right and sometimes wrong. In short, the learner is inconsistent, behaving as if he knew a particular rule but simply failed to apply it. This is known as "the practice stage" of learning.

On the other hand, there is another stage in which the learner gets constructions wrong most of the time, and only occasionally hits the right form, as if by chance. This is the stage of random guessing or the pre-systematic stage. The learner has only a vague awareness of the fact that the target language has a specific system. For example, during the stage of pre-systematic errors, in the area of syntax, we would expect the second language learner of English to randomly affix tense endings to verbs. When he has begun to discover the function of these affixes he will enter the stage of systematic errors. He will try to discover how the system of tense endings works, testing out different hypotheses. At a certain point the learner will discover the correct system but will be inconsistent (for a period) in his application of what he knows. This is the post-systematic stage of errors or practice stage of learning referred to above.



The above classification of stages is over-simplified in that a learner is in a different stage of learning in respect of every different system of the language: pre-systematic in certain areas, systematic in others and post-systematic in still others.

When a learner has made an error and we ask him to correct it, there are only two possible scenarios, either he can or he cannot. In the pre-systematic stage, since he has not yet realised that there is a system or what its function is, he can neither correct his error nor say what his problem is; in the systematic stage, he cannot correct his error but he can give some explanation of what he was aiming at or trying to do; in the post-systematic stage, he can both correct his error and explain what was wrong – for instance, that he had overlooked something or simply forgotten to apply a rule that he knows.

These stages can be summarised as follows (Corder 1973:272):

<b>Error type</b>	<b>Correction possible</b>	<b>Explanation possible</b>
1. Pre-systematic	No	No
2. Systematic	No	Yes
3. Post-systematic	Yes	Yes

### **2.3.3.3 Data for error analysis**

One cannot begin to describe something until you are aware of its existence. Unfortunately, recognising an error is not such a simple matter as it sounds. Experienced teachers become expert at this but the layperson probably does not recognise half the errors made by a foreign speaker of his language for what they are.

The first stage in the technical process of describing the linguistic nature of errors is to detect them. The difficulty in doing this lies in the fact that what looks or sounds like a perfectly acceptable sentence may nevertheless contain errors. By "acceptable" is meant a sentence that the native speaker

would accept as well-formed and might himself utter on an appropriate occasion. In many cases, the sentence is not acceptable and then we know it is erroneous. Such sentences we can call "overtly erroneous". Those sentences that are erroneous but not overtly so, we can call "covertly erroneous". A sentence must not only be acceptable, however, it must also be appropriate, that is, relevant and intelligible in a specific context. The covertly erroneous sentences are those that are not appropriate in the context in which they occur. A student who wrote *I want to know the English* wrote a perfectly acceptable sentence, which, interpreted independently of its context, expressed unexceptionable sentiments. The context of the sentence showed, however, that his interest lay not in the people but in their language. Any identification of error therefore necessarily involves interpretation in the context.

A further question to be clarified is whether the learner's intention and the actual message that he conveyed were the same. It sometimes happens that the learner intended one thing but said another. Although the sentence was grammatically well-formed, he would gather from the response he received that he had phrased his utterance incorrectly. Suppose, for example, that the learner asks: *What is the size of the dress?* while he actually wants to know what the colour is. Only when he receives the response *It is a size 10*, will he realise that he has used an incorrect word and that he needs to rephrase his question. In other words, the question *What is the size of the dress?* is perfectly acceptable and appropriate, but the intention of the learner is different to the outcome. The intention of the learner is sometimes difficult to detect in written responses and a covertly erroneous sentence may not be indicated as such.

Within the framework of error analysis, most errors are considered to be characteristic of certain stages of the language-learning process. The interim series of stages of language learning between the first and the second language (through which all second language learners must pass on their way to attaining fluency in the target language) is generally referred to as

“interlanguage”. The nature and properties of a learner’s interlanguage will be discussed next.

#### **2.3.3.4 Interlanguage**

The term “interlanguage” was coined by the American linguist Larry Selinker, in recognition of the fact that second language (L2) learners construct a linguistic system that draws, in part, on the learner's first language (L1) but is also different from it and also from the target language. A learner's interlanguage is, therefore, a unique linguistic system. Corder (1981:66) states that the study of interlanguage is the study of the language systems of language learners or simply the study of language learners' language. Ellis (1997:33) defines interlanguage as a linguistic system, which is separate from the mother tongue as well as the target language. It is governed by its own rules and in a continuous state of change. Cook (2002:20-21) states that interlanguage is the sum of all the rules a learner has acquired so far, but also says the language systems of second language users have commonly been treated in terms of the native speaker of the target language and that there have been very few attempts to establish a basic grammar for second language users independently of the first language concerned.

The terms “interlanguage” and “interlingua” suggest that the learner's language will show systematic features of the target language and of the other languages he may know, most obviously his mother tongue. In a multilingual society like the one in South Africa, the interlanguage of a learner may be extremely complex, suggesting interference by many different languages. In other words, his system is a mixed or intermediate one. Corder (1981: 68), taking as basis Chomsky’s notion of grammatical competence, has coined the term “transitional competence”. This term refers to a certain body of knowledge which the learner possesses, which hopefully is constantly developing, which underlies the utterances he makes, and which it is the task of the applied linguist to investigate.

The notion of interlanguage was introduced because studies showed that the language of L2 learners regularly display formal features both of the target language and of some other languages, although not exclusively of the mother tongue. Remnants of the mother tongue found in the interlanguage can of course be due to first language transfer.

However, there are also cases where virtually no syntactic interference has been detected from the mother tongue or any other language the learner may know. This is common where a learner becomes fully bilingual.

Fanakalo, a language spoken by especially black South African miners, could be regarded as an extreme form of an interlanguage. The reason is that Fanakalo shows remnants of a variety of different languages that may have become a target language in itself over the years as it is not a pure form of any language it includes. Therefore, it has also been labelled as a pidgin language (Mesthrie, et al. (2000:280).

Pidgins, according to Mesthrie, et al. (2000: 280), arise when groups of people who do not speak a common language come into contact with each other. The acquisition of a pidgin language differs from the process of second language acquisition as pidgins are not necessarily targeted at one of the pre-existing languages, since the main aim is communication and not the complete acquisition of a new language. The term “pidgin” therefore refers to a simple form of language showing signs of language mixing, which no one speaks as their first language. The structure of Fanakalo, however, according to Mesthrie, et al. (2000: 288) seems closer to English than to any other language. It is also categorised as a “stable pidgin”, which has a recognisable structure and fairly developed vocabulary, but which is in practice limited to only a few domains – in this instance, the mining workplace.

Brown (1987:175) distinguishes between four stages of interlanguage development. The first is the pre-systematic stage where learners make errors in a random fashion. The second is the emergent stage where learners start to discern a system and internalise some of the rules of the system. The third

is the systematic stage where learner errors become more systematic because the learner's interlanguage rules become more consistent and approximate the target language more closely. It is during this systematic stage that the danger of fossilisation or incompleteness frequently arises. Fossilisation, according to Towell and Hawkins (1994:2), is a “stopping-short of native proficiency of the target language”. After many years of exposure to an L2, where the speaker might use that L2 every day for normal communicative purposes, it is not uncommon to find that the speaker still has a strong "foreign" accent, uses non-native grammatical constructions, and has non-native intuitions about the interpretation of certain types of sentences.

Fossilisation could be of both an internal and external nature. On an internal, psychological level, the learner could decide that he or she communicates effectively in the target language and therefore it is not necessary to develop his or her interlanguage any further (Towell and Hawkins 1994:3). And on a neurological level, it is possible that fossilisation may take place when, because of the neural changes associated with age, the process of hypothesis testing becomes limited. An external cause of fossilisation could be that the learner is no longer in contact with adequate second language input.

The fourth and final stage of interlanguage development is the stage of stabilisation when the learners make relatively few errors and do not have many problems with either the intended meaning or fluency.

#### **2.3.3.5 Methodology of an error analysis**

According to Jurgensen (1996:51), a number of steps can be identified in an error analysis (also see 3.4):

- Selection of a language corpus;
- Identification/recognition of errors;
- Description of errors;
- Explanation of errors; and

- Therapy/remediation of errors.

These steps are briefly described below.

**(a) Selection of a language corpus**

The selection of a language corpus involves deciding on factors such as the size of the sample, the medium to be sampled and the homogeneity of the sample. Most error analyses, like the one presented in this study for example, use regular tests or examination papers for material. However, Svartnik (1973:12-13) points out that it is important to supplement these textual data with data drawn from various other elicitation procedures, such as interviews or observation of the learner actually using the language in a given setting.

**(b) Identification/recognition of errors**

Corder (1981:21) suggests that one should consider all sentences to be idiosyncratic until they are shown to be otherwise. Still, when attempting to identify an error, there are a number of important points to be considered:

- If there is any doubt in the teacher's mind whether a specific utterance contains an error or not, the learner should be given the benefit of the doubt and the utterance should be taken to be correct. It is unreasonable to expect of a learner to identify an error that the educator is not able to identify conclusively.
- When attempting to identify errors, it is imperative that one takes note of the context in which the utterance took place. This is especially true if the medium of language production is spoken language where non-verbal language or gestures, intonation and stress play an important role in the meaning conveyed by the utterances.

**(c) Description of errors**

According to Ellis (1997:54), this step involves giving a grammatical description of each error. Before starting to describe each error, one should first determine which errors to consider in a particular analysis. To describe each and every error in a language corpus could be overwhelming.

In the first place, it is pointless to consider slips of the tongue and hesitations as even native speakers produce such errors. The question is whether it is fair to expect a standard of language proficiency from second-language learners that one would not demand from native speakers. The analyst should, therefore, limit his/her study to only those errors that are recurrent and systematic (Roos 1990:23).

Secondly, if one agrees that the goal of a second language learner is attaining communicative competence, there are four categories of errors that can be focused on in keeping with the four aspects of communicative competence as identified by Brumfit (1984: 138):

- Errors in grammatical competence, i.e. errors regarding grammatical knowledge and the lexical items of a language;
- Errors in socio-linguistic competence, i.e. in the knowledge of the socio-cultural rules and social context of language and discourse;
- Errors in discourse competence, i.e. in the ability to link sentences in stretches of discourse to form a meaningful whole out of a series of utterances; and
- Errors in strategic competence, i.e. in the erroneous use of communication strategies.

For the purpose of this study, the main focus will lie with the analysis of errors in grammatical competence. However, spelling errors, which lie outside the parameters of grammatical errors, will also be included.

Without downplaying the importance of errors in socio-linguistic, discourse, and strategic competence, it is generally accepted that grammatical competence is a prerequisite for effective communication. Although the relative importance of the grammaticality (or form) of an utterance and its function may vary from situation to situation, form remains an integral part of function and if the form of an utterance is distorted, then the function is likely to change and some of the meaning (function) can be lost.

According to Major (1988:84), “distorted form” is a type of noise that interferes with the message. Roos (1990:76) elaborates on this stating that it implies that grammatical competence determines semantic options to a certain extent, in other words, the meanings that a speaker is able to express in a language are restricted by the grammatical means of expression that have been mastered.

The reaction of a native speaker to grammatical (or formal) errors made by a second language speaker also suggests that formal accuracy is of the utmost importance, especially in such a linguistically diverse community as in South Africa. Although understanding may be the main aim of a second language learner, as far as interpersonal communication is concerned, it is important that the language of a second language learner does not lead to a negative or prejudiced reaction by native speakers with whom he intends to communicate. While certain errors may lead to a breakdown in communication, others may lead to irritation on the part of the listener, which in terms of social relations is equally undesirable (Norrish 1983:98).

Formal accuracy is also imperative in academic, professional and sophisticated settings (Roos 1992:60). It is not sufficient in such a setting to simply be understood; it is necessary for the individual to converse in the target language as accurately as possible, because a standard language "has to do with passing exams, getting on in the world, respectability, prestige and success" (Roos 1991: 9). Language learners are often aware of the potential negative consequences of a lack of formal accuracy in their use of a particular language, and this leads to the well-known reluctance of the language learner to use the target language at all ("inhibition") or feelings of inferiority with regards to his or her language production.

In South Africa, we also have the situation of English being the “desired”, the “socially and politically acceptable”, language because of a variety of reasons. One reason is because English is regarded as the major business language and also the language that people of different mother tongues have in common. The use of Afrikaans is no longer “politically correct” in many circles,



to such an extent that many people pretend not to speak or understand it, although they may have a considerable level of proficiency in it.

In the case of teachers required to supply training in a language that is not their mother tongue, having learners for whom the language of instruction is also a second or even a third language, the consequences are even more far-reaching. Norrish (1983:58) points out that while native speakers who hear the erroneous use of their language may make sense of utterances that are not grammatically correct, the listener who is not a native speaker will experience greater difficulty in the interpretation of such utterances because of the fact that "he may simply not understand some of the words said to him; he cannot afford to miss any other carriers of meaning (as the native speaker can) if he is to understand the gist of what is said to him".

#### **(d) Explanation of errors**

At the point of providing explanations in an error analysis, the psycholinguistic causes of the errors should be identified. In this study, this will be the main focus as one attempts to establish whether the errors are as a result of language transfer (mother tongue interference); overgeneralisation of target language rules; transfer of training; strategies of second language learning; second language communication strategies, etc. According to Ellis (1997: 53), the explanation of errors can be used to "investigate the various processes that contribute to interlanguage development".

Closely linked with the task of providing explanations, is the issue of evaluation or grading. According to Ellis (1997: 55) this involves the assessment of the relative importance of each of the studied errors in order to make decisions as to type, scope and method of remediation required. The goal of establishing such second language error hierarchies is to help second language teachers to focus on areas of language production that have been judged by native speakers to be most disruptive to communication.

Johannson (1973:110) suggests that in order to establish the relative seriousness of errors, four factors should be considered:

- Generality: infringements of general rules are regarded as more serious than lexical rules (for example, the general rule regarding common sentence structure – subject/verb/object – is more important than the use of the correct connotation of a word);
- Frequency: errors involving common words and constructions are regarded as more serious than others;
- Comprehensibility: lexical errors may be considered to affect comprehensibility to a greater extent than grammatical errors; and
- Degree of irritation: grammatical errors are more likely to cause irritation than lexical errors.

Krashen (1988:191) distinguishes between global and local errors. Global errors, according to his definition, are errors that significantly affect overall sentence organisation and that hinder communication. Examples of global errors are missing, wrong or misplaced connectors, the wrong order of major constituents and direct transfer of language items from first to second language.

Local errors, on the other hand, are errors that affect single elements in a sentence and that are unlikely to hinder communication significantly. Examples of this type include errors in noun and verb inflections, articles, auxiliaries and the use of quantifiers.

It is clear from this distinction that a learner can be clearly understood even though local errors may have occurred. However, in order to achieve near-native fluency, it is essential to avoid both local errors and global errors.

#### **(e) Therapy or remediation of errors**

The therapy stage of error analysis deals with directives of how best to address learners' errors in terms of learning tasks (Roos 1990:29).

It is, of course, important to decide whether remediation is in fact necessary. This can be determined by taking into consideration the knowledge

possessed by a learner and the demands of his situation. Corder (1981:46-47) distinguishes three levels of mismatch between language knowledge and situational demands:

- an acceptable degree of mismatch, which does not require remediation: the learner can maintain himself in the situation with the amount of knowledge he possesses;
- a remediable degree of mismatch: the learner does not possess enough knowledge to cope adequately with a given situation but does possess sufficient knowledge to be able to learn what is demanded by the situation, with or without treatment;
- an irremediable degree of mismatch: the degree of mismatch between knowledge and the demands of the situation is too great to be remedied effectively.

Through the Business Writing courses, NELS is aiming at an acceptable degree of mismatch, by remedying the errors that manifest themselves in the delegates' writing and interaction during training.

### **2.3.3.6 The shortcomings of an error analysis**

A first major criticism that can be levelled against error analysis is the fact that it only takes into account the error and not the correct structures used by the learner. Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1971:276) state: "To consider only what the learner produces in error and to exclude from consideration the learner's non-errors is tantamount to describe a code of manners on the basis of the observed breaches of the code." It is of the utmost importance that the correct structures are noted because that would help with the design of remediation material.

Secondly, error analysis tends to focus only on specific, limited categories of error. Norrish (1983:88) comments: "If we remember that any language is a system, which is itself comprised of different systems ... then we are better

placed to realise that simply eradicating one error or a set of errors is not in itself likely to help learners to actually improve their capacity to use the language for communicative purposes."

A third difficulty facing error analysis concerns the identification of errors, as different people at different times have widely varied ideas as to what is erroneous. It is true that what was not accepted a few years ago could now be considered to be acceptable and vice versa. Language is dynamic and in a continual state of change. This has to be taken into consideration when adapting previous remediation techniques. Similar difficulties, furthermore, arise in the classification and description of errors. Certain errors resist classification. For example, in written English, is *chose* instead of *choose* a spelling or a tense error?

When trying to establish the cause of errors, the analyst can face similar difficulties, as ambiguity exists with the classification of many errors as either interlingual or developmental, for example the omission of the '-s' of the third-person singular form by Afrikaans first language speakers of English. Jain (1974:190) points out that "errors do not seem to submit themselves to any precise systematic analysis; the division between errors traceable to first language interference and those that are independent of first language interference is not invariably clear-cut; the phenomenon of errors caused by the cross-association of both first and second language also seems to exist".

## **2.4 Summary**

Although the interpretation of the results of an error analysis is not the only tool that can be used to devise remediation material, it can be used to a large extent to establish what types of errors are most frequently made; what the possible reason for the occurrence of the error may be; and what technique will be the most appropriate one to use for remediation.

## **2.5 Aspects of second language acquisition**

### **2.5.1 Second language acquisition hypotheses**

There are several second language acquisition theories, among otherst, the Universal Grammar theory of which Lydia White is an influential proponent. Noam Chomsky (1965:21) argued that the brain contains a limited set of rules for organising language. Moreover, it is generally assumed that all languages have a common structural base. This shared set of grammatical devices is called “Universal Grammar”.

For the limited purposes of this study, however, Krashen’s (1987) second language acquisition theory will be discussed in more depth. Krashen’s theory consists of the following hypotheses (1987:9):

- The acquisition-learning hypothesis
- The natural-order hypothesis
- The monitor hypothesis
- The input hypothesis
- The affective-filter hypothesis

A description of the first four hypotheses follows in the subsections below. The affective-filter hypothesis is not discussed as it has little relevance for this study.

#### **2.5.1.1 The acquisition-learning hypothesis**

This hypothesis states that adults have two distinct and independent ways of developing competence in a second language (Krashen 1987:10). The first way is language acquisition, a similar process to the way children develop knowledge of their first language. This is a subconscious process, which includes implicit learning, informal learning and natural learning. Krashen (2002:1) later equates these forms of learning to unconscious processes,

which take place when a learner is exposed to the target language in any medium.

The second way to develop competence in a language, according to Krashen (1987:10), is by language learning. This results in conscious knowledge of a second language: knowing the rules, being aware of them and being able to talk about them. As noted in 2.3.3.5, for the purpose of the error analysis conducted in this study, grammatical as well as orthographic/spelling errors will be analysed. Therefore, both acquired and learned knowledge will be assessed.

### **2.5.1.2 The natural-order hypothesis**

This hypothesis states that the acquisition of grammatical structures tends to proceed in a predictable order. Second language learners, like first language learners, tend to acquire certain grammatical structures early and others later (Krashen 1987:11).

### **2.5.1.3 The monitor hypothesis**

While the acquisition-learning distinction claims that two separate processes co-exist in the adult second language learner, it does not state how they are used in language performance. The monitor hypothesis, according to Krashen (1987:15), posits that acquisition and learning are used in very specific ways. Acquisition initiates our utterances in a second language and is responsible for our fluency whereas learning has only one function – that of editor or monitor. Learning comes into play only to make changes in the form of our utterance, after it has been produced by the acquired system. This can happen while we speak or write, or afterwards as self-correction. Figure 1 illustrates the process:

**Figure 1**

The monitor hypothesis implies that consciously learned formal rules play only a limited role in second language performance.

Krashen (1987:19) distinguishes three variations in monitor use: the monitor over-users; the monitor under-users, and the optimal monitor users. Firstly, the monitor over-users are people who tend to monitor all the time; performers who are continuously checking their conscious knowledge of the second language. The result of this is that such performers tend to speak hesitantly, often self-correcting in the middle of utterances, and are so concerned with correctness that they cannot speak with any real fluency. This is often a problem with White Afrikaans mother tongue speakers, when speaking English. Self-correction often results in the flow of thought being impeded.

Krashen (1987:19) identifies two possible reasons for the over-use of consciously learned grammar. On the one hand, over-use may derive from the performers' history of exposure to the second language if they were exposed to grammar-only instruction. On the other hand, over-use may relate to personality. Over-users have had the chance to acquire knowledge, and may have actually acquired a great deal of second language knowledge, but they simply do not trust their acquired competence and only feel secure when they refer to their monitor for confirmation. In Apartheid years White Afrikaans mother tongue speakers seldom used English in the social sense, conversing in Afrikaans most of the time. When the need arose for White Afrikaans mother tongue speakers to use English it was done so hesitantly as they had very little practice in conversing in English.

Secondly, monitor under-users are performers who have not consciously learned particular rules and constructions, or if they have learned them, prefer not to use their conscious knowledge, even when conditions allow it. Under-users are typically uninfluenced by error correction and can self-correct only by using a “feel for correctness” .

Thirdly, optimal monitor users are performers who can use their learned competence as a supplement to their acquired competence. Some optimal users who have not completely acquired the second language can use their conscious grammar so effectively that they appear to be native speakers of the language. This is often the case with sophisticated Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers of English, who also are exposed to English on a sustained basis, like those living in urban areas.

#### **2.5.1.4 The input hypothesis**

Krashen (1987:20) states that the input hypothesis attempts to answer the question of how language is acquired. It claims the following (where  $i$  represents the current competence and  $i+1$  the next level): a necessary but not sufficient condition to move from stage  $i$  to  $i+1$  is that the acquirer understands input that contains  $i+1$ , where “understand” means that the acquirer is focused on the meaning and not the form of the message.

In other words, we acquire knowledge only when we understand language that contains structures that are a “little beyond” where we are now because we use more than our linguistic competence to help us understand; we also use context, our knowledge of the world, and other extra-linguistic information to help us understand language directed at us.

The concept of 'comprehensible input' supports this notion: learners must understand the message that is conveyed. Learners acquire language by hearing and understanding messages that are slightly above their current language level (Krashen 1987:20).



To summarise: The input hypothesis relates to acquisition, not learning. We acquire knowledge by understanding language that contains structure beyond our current level of competence ( $i + 1$ ). This is done with the help of context and extra-linguistic information. When communication is successful, when the input is understood and there is enough of it,  $i + 1$  will be provided automatically. Production ability emerges over time and is not taught directly.

#### **2.5.1.5 Cook's model of multicompetence**

Cook (1991) defined multicompetence as the knowledge of two or more grammars in one mind. This concept was later expanded to the 'integration continuum', which deals with the various relationships that may obtain between the two or more languages in one mind, in particular to the effects of the second language on the first, which is known as "reverse transfer". A multicompetent user is not two monolinguals in one person, but has an integrated knowledge of the two languages, which interact and affect each other. The multicompetency theory predicts that L2 users use their L2 writing systems in ways that differ from L1 writing system users with only a single writing system. (Cook and Bassetti: 2005:45).

Multicompetence is however, not always pure as the one language interferes so much with the other that neither is standard and uncontaminated anymore. It is then when neither of the languages sounds like a mother-tongue anymore, and when both are seen as non-standard variants of the respective languages.

## **2.6 Language diversity in South Africa**

The linguistic landscape of South Africa is very diverse. Apart from the 11 official languages of South Africa, namely Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho sa Leboa, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga, a variety of Asian and European languages are also spoken as mother tongues.

According to Census 2001, isiZulu is the mother tongue of 23,8% of the population, followed by isiXhosa (17,6%), Afrikaans (13,3%), Sesotho sa Leboa (9,4%), and English and Setswana (8,2% each).

Although English is only the mother tongue of 8,2% of the population, it is the language most widely understood, and the second language of the majority of South Africans. However, in terms of South Africa's Constitution the government is committed to promoting all the official languages (Burger, D. (ed): 2008:2).

As a language of business, English is uncontested in South Africa and most companies enforce it as the means of communication in any formal business environment, whether it is in a meeting, a training session, negotiations or annual reports. Nedbank is no exception. Although most of Nedbank's marketing material are available in both English and Afrikaans, meetings are conducted in English, training materials are in English and the two flagship publications of Nedbank, the *Annual Report* and the *Sustainability Report* are published only in English.

## **2.6.1 Varieties of Afrikaans**

### **2.6.1.1 The notion of South African 'Coloured' versus South African 'White' mother tongue speaker of Afrikaans**

Broadly speaking the term "Coloured" is part of a national system of communal identity formation whose two poles are "Black" and "White". Coloured identity is thus regarded as intermediate and deracinated (Stone, G.L. in Mesthrie, R (ed) 2000: 277).

Marked changes in inter-dialectal and intra-dialectal codes have been wrought by many factors: the imposition of the Group Areas Act, which forced Coloureds to live in a restricted area, and the establishment of the Cape Flats, upward mobility and the decline of white domination. There has been a shift to bilingualism or dominance in middle-class English, and to a lesser extent

middle-class Afrikaans. The increasing number of delinquent gangs outside prison has also impacted on the lexicon of the average Coloured speaker of Afrikaans.

Since the repeal of all the major legislation of White domination in 1991, the trend towards individualism has intensified and there has been a greater degree of upward and downward mobility. The working-class Coloured trend towards the domestic or at least public or formal use of middle-class English or working-class variants of English has also grown rapidly. It has become increasingly common to find parents who converse with each other in the relevant Afrikaans dialect, rear their children in a some variety of English, and prefer English mass media (Stone, 2000 284). The stigmatisation of Afrikaans as language of the "Apartheid oppressor" has also resulted in English being preferred as language of social interaction.

An assumption that could be made from the above is that if Afrikaans mother tongue speakers increasingly prefer to converse in English on social and business level, the level of English proficiency should be on the increase, because self-exposure to English is higher. However, if the only exposure to English is not of grammatically correct English, proficiency levels will not necessarily improve. In the results of the assessment the contamination of English structures by Afrikaans features is still evident, for example in the case of question 4, where *who* instead of *whom* is used ("deur wie"), apparently because interrogative pronouns are not marked for accusative case in Afrikaans.

## **2.7 Summary**

Chapter 2 addressed various aspects that are directly or indirectly involved in doing the error analysis of English Second Language speakers, specifically aspects relating to second language acquisition and models of intercultural communication. Chapter 3 now deals with Nedbank's language policy, which underpins the assessments and training of Nedbank delegates on the business-writing courses.

## **Chapter 3: Nedbank's language policy**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Nedbank's language policy ensures compliance with legislative, regulatory and supervisory language requirements in terms of the Banks Act, Code of Banking Practice, Financial Sector Charter, National Credit Bill, Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services Act, Companies Act, JSE Listings Requirements, Constitution Act, Nedbank Group Enterprise-wide Risk Management Framework, etc. The policy also serves to mitigate reputational and possible financial risk and supports market share growth for sustainable business.

Any of the official languages of South Africa may be used to achieve Nedbank's business goals. Its choice of language(s), however, depends on purpose, circumstances and legal requirements.

Nedbank's language policy has to be implemented involving the appropriate role-players, including the departments of Editorial and Language Services, Forms Management and Design, and Legal and Marketing.

### **3.2 Written communication**

In the case of written language the policy entails the following:

#### **3.2.1 Internal communications and record-keeping**

For reasons of cost-effectiveness Nedbank's internal language of communication and of record is English. Therefore all manuals, circulars, etc. are produced in English only.

### **3.2.2 Standard legal agreements**

Nedbank drafts legal agreements in English and Afrikaans, because currently these are the only two official languages with fully developed legal terminologies.

### **3.2.3 Standard forms**

Nedbank drafts standard forms in English and Afrikaans and in any of the other official languages, where appropriate and possible.

### **3.2.4 Standard letters**

Standard letters are written in the language of a client's choice, where this is possible.

### **3.2.5 Business cards**

Bilingual business cards are produced in English plus another official language determined by the client base.

### **3.2.6 Marketing material**

Market forces, as well as legislative and other requirements, determine the language of Nedbank's marketing material. This means that brochures, posters, advertisements, etc. are produced in English and Afrikaans and, in some instances, the other indigenous languages such as isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho.

### **3.2.7 Branch signage**

Market forces determine the language of Nedbank's branch signage, which means a multilingual approach is followed, with the languages used in a branch determined by area, branch, client base, etc.

### **3.2.8 Reporting**

Where Nedbank is required to report to, for instance, the Registrar of Banks, the Registrar of Companies, the Reserve Bank, the JSE Limited or the bank's shareholders (such as Old Mutual plc), it does so in English. When reporting to its stakeholders at large, the bank also uses mainly English, but will use the other official languages where appropriate.

### **3.2.9 Oral communication**

In the case of oral communication, Nedbank's language policy implies that a client is served in the language of his or her choice if there is a staff member in a particular branch who can speak the language concerned, understands the product or service under discussion and is available. If not, English has to be used. From a marketing and business point of view branches should obviously take into account the prevalent languages in their regions when appointing staff, in so far as this is possible.

### **3.2.10 Service providers**

Language services for English, Afrikaans, Sesotho and isiZulu are provided centrally by Nedbank Editorial and Language Services (NELS), while services for other languages are outsourced by NELs to approved service providers.

### **3.2.11 Inhouse conventions**

A selection of inhouse writing conventions, which is also discussed during the Business Writing courses, and is taken from the Basic Business Writing materials, follows:

There is a great deal of confusion around the spelling of words. The problem is compounded by the fact that the spelling checker on the majority of computers questions the British spelling forms, yet recognises the American equivalent of these forms.

Since financial institutions, as well as the majority of corporate communicators and journalists in South Africa, follow the spelling conventions of British Standard English, we should not be ready to change the spelling of a word simply because of a wavy red line that appears under the particular word on the computer screen.

The following table of variants will be helpful in applying the correct spelling conventions:

<b>WORD TYPES</b>	<b>BRITISH SPELLING</b>	<b>AMERICAN SPELLING</b>
General	adviser cheque jewellery tyre speciality sceptical storey ageing likeable ensure insure (cover)	advisor check jewelry tire specialty skeptical story aging likable insure insure
-our and -or	colour favour honour flavour labour neighbour behaviour rumour	color favor honor flavor labor neighbor behavior rumor
-re and -er	centre (n) centre (v) (centred) kilometre litre fibre meagre sombre theatre	center (n) center (v) (centered) kilometer liter fiber meager somber theater
-ise and -ize	organise criticise realise analyse scrutinise	organize criticize realize analyze scrutinize

	finalise energise	finalize energize
-ence and -ense	defence licence (n) license (v) practice (n) practise (v) offence pretence	defense license (n) license (v) practise (n) practise (v) offense pretense
-ogue and -og	catalogue dialogue analogue	catalog dialog analog
-amme and -am	programme (general) program (computer)	program (general) program (computer)
-ll- and -l-	counsellor travelled traveller woollen (un)equalled marvellous	counselor traveled traveler woolen (un)equaled marvelous
-l- and -ll-	enrol fulfil appal instil wilful skilful	enroll fulfill appall instill willful skillful
-s- and -ss-	focused/focusing	focussed/focussing

Words often change with time as a result of spelling trends and frequency of use. For example, the following are no longer hyphenated: (a) **backup**, **buyback**, **buyout**, **cashup**, **chargeback**, **cutoff**, **dialup**, **dropoff**, **feedback**, **followup**, **handover**, **logon**, **logoff**, **markup**, **pickup**, **rollout**, **setoff**, **signoff**, **spinoff**, **startup**, **takeover**, **takeup** and **writeoff** (verb + adverb), (b) **downgrade**, **download**, **offload**, **unload**, **update**, **upgrade**, **upload**, **uptake** (prefix + verb) and (c) **inbranch**, **indepth**, **inhouse**, **inoffice**, **instore**, **offline**, **offshore**, **online**, **overborder** and **upstream** (adverb + noun).



Note the spelling of **abovementioned, accountholder, aforementioned, bankwide, boardmember, bondholder, cardholder, cardmember, cashback, cellphone, checklist, chequebook, countrywide, crossborder, database, deadline, decisionmaking, email, groupwide, helpdesk, helpline, hotline, installation, instalment, intergroup, intragroup, kiteflying, laptop, macroeconomic, mainframe, marketplace, microeconomic, minibranch, ministatement, nationwide, ongoing, paypoint, policyholder, postcode, preactive, proactive, reactive, readvance, reassess, reinforce, reorganise, reuse, reverification, roleplayer, staffmember, standalone, subbranch, tailormade, teambuilding, teamleader, teammember, timeframe, timeline, tollfree, tollgate, tollroad, topclass, undermentioned, underway, upfront, workplace, worldclass and worldwide.**

The computer spelling checker should be set up to default to UK English. If the American spelling checker has been loaded on the computer, it can be customised to recognise the British spelling convention by adding the preferred spellings listed above to the dictionary of the American spelling checker.

### **3.2.11 Commentary on Nedbank's Language Policy**

From the above, it is clear that despite efforts to include as many of the official languages in as wide a variety of documentation as possible, English remains the predominant language of communication within Nedbank. Therefore, competence by Nedbank employees in both spoken and written English is crucial.

## **3.3 Conclusion**

In Chapter 3 Nedbank's language policy has been discussed, which is important for comprehension of the items tested in the preassessment. The research methodology and analysis of this study and the content of the pre-assessment is discussed in Chapter 4.

## **Chapter 4: Research methodology and analysis**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The author is in the fortunate position of being an internal language and communication trainer of Nedbank, and had already developed and tested training materials and assessments for the Business Writing courses. All the pre-assessments were done hands-on with immediate access to the results after every course. This made the data collection and processing of the data fairly uncomplicated.

### **4.2 Data collection**

Data collection for this study has taken place during the monthly Basic Business Writing courses presented by the author. The main source of information was the pre-assessment that is done by the delegates at the start of each course after introductions have been made. This assessment is, therefore, done before any training takes place. The reason for this is that it allows one to assess the existing English language competence of each delegate before any further learning takes place.

None of the delegates whose results are used in this study has had any further language training after school and/or since joining Nedbank. The impact of the mother tongue variant should, therefore, be uncontaminated by any further formal learning. Informal acquisition would however continue and be highly impacted by workplace Afrikaans, social groupings, media, etc.

A post-assessment was also done, usually on the second day at the end of the course, just before delegates leave. Although a comparison between results of the pre-assessment and the post-assessment is not the main focus of this study, it is worth mentioning that without exception the results of all the delegates in the post-assessment are better (between 5% and 20%) than initially in the pre-assessment at the start of the course.

Although the course lasts only two days, it is very intensive. After the initial shock of an information overload – most delegates have only dealt with language this intensively at school level – they gradually ease into the rest of course. The course is interactive and not presented as a series of lectures. It is also interesting to note how delegates start correcting each other after the first morning, but all in good humour.

### 4.3 Pre-assessment of Basic Business Writing delegates

The pre-assessment at every course is done before any information sharing has taken place. It tests a variety of English grammar and in-house style items. Each delegate has to correct the given sentences according to Nedbank in-house style and appropriate UK grammar conventions. A copy of the pre-assessment is given below, followed by a memorandum. The number of errors and/or changes to be made in every sentence is indicated in brackets in the pre-assessment paper.

#### 4.3.1 Basic Business Writing: Pre-assessment paper

Give the correct answer at each question by either encircling or filling in your choice or correcting any incorrect words or phrases in the editing questions:

1. Last night at 12 all the EFT entries (effect) (1)
2. The lady, (who) ..... credit card (steal) .....,  
was (reimbursed/re-imbursed). (3)
3. By that time sixteen (fraud) transactions (report) (2)
4. By (who).....was the check signed? (2)
5. As a valued client we would like to offer you a Nedbank Gold  
Credit Card. (1)
6. All socio-economic indicators point in 1 direction. (2)
7. The Deep Green value, which was respected most, was integrity. (2)
8. He is one of those men who (like/likes) to take risks. (1)
9. Forensics deal with all types of suspicious transactions e.g. card-  
skimming, hacking, etc. (4)
10. Load shedding has a detrimental affect on the economy. (2)
11. At the age of ten, the mother opened a debit-card account for her son. (2)

12. Since Tom Boardman (take) over as C.E.O, Nedbank's result's has steadily improved. (3)
13. The annual results have improved, we can expect better bonus's. (2)
14. Bosses' Day should be celebrated appropriately. (1)
15. A HR program are very comprehensive. (3)
16. Shuter, with the Retail branch managers, (work/works) very hard. (1)
17. After we (return) from the road show, we (report) back to our colleagues. (3)
18. A driver's license is a requirement for FICA validation. (2)
19. Before Willem Kruger took the position at legal, he (practice) law at a private firm. (3)
20. At Nedbank we value our customers. (1)
21. Remember to bring your ID document with. (1)
22. Mergers & Acquisitions (is/are) a very popular division. (2)
23. Nedbanks Sustainability report is a world-class publication which has won many rewards. (5)
24. Mr G. Nienaber, the company secretary of Nedbank also has a collection of vintage motorcycles. (4)

**Total: [53]**

#### **4.3.2 Memorandum of the pre-assessment and item analysis (IA) of each question**

The correct answers for the pre-assessment are as follows:

1. Last night at 12 all the EFT entries were being affected.  
**IA: tense (past continuous passive)**
2. The lady whose credit card had been stolen, was reimbursed.  
**IA: possessive pronoun (whose); tense (past perfect passive)  
spelling (no hyphen with prefix re-)**
3. By that time sixteen fraudulent transactions had been reported.  
**IA: derivative (fraudulent) tense (past perfect passive)**
4. By whom was the cheque signed?  
**IA: possessive third-person pronoun (objective pronoun) – dative case (whom); spelling (cheque)**

5. We would like to offer you, as a valued client, a Nedbank Gold Credit Card.

**IA: Word order/Dangler**

6. All socioeconomic indicators point in one direction.

**IA: spelling, no hyphen (socio-economic); writing out of all numerals less than ten (one)**

7. The Deep Green value that was respected most, was integrity.

**IA: definitive clause starting with 'that'; omission of first comma because of changing 'which' to 'that'.**

8. He is one of those men who like to take risks.

**IA: concord (one of those – plural)**

9. Forensics deals with all types of suspicious transactions eg card skimming, and hacking (omission of etc).

**IA: concord (Forensics – singular); no full stops in abbreviations (eg); insertion of and; omission of etc. (either eg or etc; not both).**

10. Load-shedding has a detrimental effect on the economy.

**IA: new term in English so frequently used, that concept is fixed in mind of readers, therefore already hyphenated (load-shedding); confusing word pairs (effect/affect)**

11. The mother opened a debit card account for her son who was aged ten.

**IA: spelling (debit card – no hyphen); word order/dangler (her son who was aged ten)**

12. Since Tom Boardman took over as CEO, Nedbank's results have steadily improved.

**IA: tense (took); CEO (no full stops in abbreviations); spelling (results – no apostrophe for plurals in English); concord (have)**

13. The annual results have improved; we can expect better bonuses.

**IA: comma splice error – replace comma with semicolon or appropriate conjunction to join two main sentences; spelling plural form no apostrophe (bonuses)**

14. Boss's Day should be celebrated appropriately.

**IA: spelling with apostrophe (Boss's)**

15. An HR programme is very comprehensive.

**IA: correct use of indefinite article (an); difference between ‘programme’ and ‘program’; concord (is)**

16. Shuter, with the Retail branch managers, works very hard.

**IA: concord when using “as well as”**

17. After we had/have returned home from the roadshow, we reported/report back to our colleagues.

**IA: tense Past/Present Perfect with “after”; spelling of colleagues**

18. A driving licence is a requirement for FICA validation.

**IA: SA/UK convention driving not driver’s; licence (noun) not license**

19. Before Willem Kruger took the position at Legal, he had practised law at a private firm.

**IA: Nedbank convention – Name of division written with capital letter; tense: past perfect with ‘before’; spelling ‘practised’ (verb – UK/SA)**

20. At Nedbank we value our clients.

**IA: Nedbank convention – ‘clients’ not ‘customers’**

21. Remember to bring you ID (or identity document) with.

**IA: Either ID or identity document; not both**

22. Mergers and Acquisitions is a very popular division.

**IA: Nedbank convention – use of ampersand not allowed; concord one division ‘is’**

23. Nedbank’s Sustainability Report is a worldclass publication, which has won many awards.

**IA: use of apostrophe; use of capital letters for publications; spelling ‘worldclass’; punctuation: comma before ‘which’**

24. Mr G Nienaber, Company Secretary of Nedbank, also has a collection of vintage motorcycles.

**IA: punctuation no full stops in abbreviations; use of capital letters for titles/designations; punctuation – commas for parenthesis.**

## **4.4 Preparing for the error analysis**

### **4.4.1 Introduction**

For the purposes of this study, Jurgensen's (1996) framework for doing an error analysis is followed. As set out in section 2.3.3.5, this framework provides for several steps in an error analysis:

- Selection of a language corpus;
- Identification/recognition of errors;
- Description of errors;
- Explanation of errors; and
- Therapy/remediation of errors.

### **4.4.2 Selection of the language corpus**

The results of delegates representative of the following mother tongue speakers were collected and compared:

- 15 delegates who are White Afrikaans mother tongue speakers (from Cape Town and Paarl); and
- 15 delegates who are Coloured Afrikaans mother tongue speakers (from Cape Town and Paarl).

The ages of the delegates range between 24 and 42, and everybody has at least a Matric qualification; 20 of the 30 delegates have a first degree. No delegate has a second or third degree.

The comparison between these two language and cultural groups is only a starting point for the customising of the training materials. They were specifically chosen as the researcher assumed as a working hypothesis that because they share a mother tongue, albeit according to different norms and standards, the extent of the mother tongue interference in the acquisition of English should be similar.







document																
22a and not &	x	x	y	y	y	x	y	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	5
22b is	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	x	y	x	y	y	y	y	y	13
23a Nedbank's	y	y	x	x	x	x	y	y	x	x	x	y	y	y	x	7
23b Report	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	1
23c worldclass	x	x	x	x	y	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	y	y	x	4
23d ,which	x	x	y	y	x	y	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	y	x	5
23e awards	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	y	x	2
24a full stop delete	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	x	1
24a Company Secretary	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	1
24b commas	x	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	x	x	y	y	y	x	11
Total	17	19	25	21	17	18	24	24	19	13	13	22	18	30	13	

**Table 2: Results of White group per question**

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Totals
1 passive	x	y	y	x	y	x	x	y	x	x	y	y	x	x	x	6
2a whose	y	y	y	x	y	y	x	y	x	x	x	x	y	x	y	8
2b had been stolen	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
2c reimbursed	x	y	y	x	y	y	x	y	y	y	y	y	y	x	y	11
3a 16	x	y	x	x	y	y	x	y	y	x	x	x	x	y	y	7
3b fraudulent	x	y	x	x	x	y	y	y	x	x	x	y	y	x	y	7

3c had been reported	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
4a whom	y	y	x	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	14
4b cheque	y	y	x	x	y	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	y	y	x	6
5 you, as a valued client	y	x	y	x	x	x	y	y	x	x	x	y	y	y	x	7
6a socio-economic	y	x	y	x	y	x	x	y	x	x	y	x	y	y	y	8
6b one	x	x	y	y	x	x	y	x	x	x	y	y	x	y	y	7
7a that	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	y	y	x	x	y	x	x	4
7b commas deleted	x	y	x	x	x	y	x	x	y	x	x	x	y	x	x	4
8 like	x	x	y	x	y	x	y	x	x	x	x	y	y	x	x	5
9a deals	x	y	x	x	y	x	x	y	y	y	y	x	y	x	y	8
9b eg	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	0
9c and hacking	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	x	x	y	x	2
9 delete etc	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	1
10a load-shedding	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	y	x	2
10b effect	y	y	x	x	y	x	x	y	x	x	x	x	y	x	y	6
11a dangler	x	x	y	x	y	x	x	y	x	x	y	x	y	x	y	6
11b 10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	x	x	y	y	y	4
11c debit card	y	y	x	x	y	y	x	x	y	x	x	x	y	y	y	8
12a took	x	x	x	y	y	y	x	y	y	x	y	y	x	y	y	9
12b CEO	x	x	y	x	x	x	x	y	x	x	x	x	y	x	x	3
12c results	y	y	y	x	x	y	y	y	y	x	x	y	y	y	y	11
12d have	x	x	x	x	y	y	y	y	y	x	y	y	y	y	y	10
13a semi-colon	x	x	y	x	y	y	x	x	y	x	y	x	y	x	y	7

13b bonuses	x	y	x	x	x	x	y	y	x	x	y	x	y	y	x	6
14 Boss's Day	y	x	x	x	x	y	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	y	x	4
15a An	x	x	x	x	y	y	y	y	y	x	x	x	x	y	y	7
15b programme	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	y	x	x	y	y	y	5
15c is	y	y	y	x	x	y	y	y	y	x	x	y	y	y	y	11
16a works	y	y	x	y	y	x	y	y	y	y	y	y	x	y	x	11
17a have/had returned	y	y	x	x	y	x	y	y	y	y	y	x	y	y	y	11
17b report/ reported	x	y	y	y	y	y	y	x	y	y	x	y	y	x	y	11
17c colleagues	x	y	y	x	y	x	y	x	y	y	y	x	x	y	y	9
18a driving	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	x	x	x	y	y	3
18b licence	y	y	x	x	y	y	x	x	y	x	x	x	y	y	y	8
19a Legal	x	y	x	x	x	y	y	x	y	x	x	x	y	y	y	7
19b had	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	y	x	x	x	x	y	x	3
19c practised	x	x	y	x	x	x	y	x	y	x	x	x	x	y	y	5
20 clients	x	x	x	x	y	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	y	y	y	5
21 identity document	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	x	y	x	y	y	x	4
22a and	x	y	y	x	y	y	x	y	x	x	x	x	y	x	y	7
22b is	y	y	y	x	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	x	y	y	y	13
23a Nedbank's	x	x	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	x	y	y	y	12
23b Report	y	x	x	y	y	x	y	y	y	y	y	x	y	x	y	9
23c worldclass	x	x	y	y	y	x	x	x	y	x	y	x	x	y	y	7
23d ,which	y	y	x	y	x	x	y	x	y	x	x	x	x	y	y	7

23e awards	x	y	x	y	x	x	x	y	x	x	x	x	x	y	y	5
24a delete fullstop	y	y	y	x	y	y	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	6
24b Company Secretary	x	y	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	y	x	2
24c comma	y	y	y	y	x	x	y	x	x	x	x	y	y	y	y	9
Total	17	27	21	11	28	21	23	29	28	13	21	14	35	35	37	

The above sets of results are analysed per item in Chapter 5.

#### 4.4.4 Description of errors

As indicated in 2.4.3.5 (c), the main focus in error analysis lies on errors in grammatical competence. However, as noted in 2.3.3.5 (c), orthographic/spelling items are also included. The item analysis done in 3.4 contains a description of each item, the competency assessed, and the correct answer for each.

#### 4.4.5 Explanation of errors

After the pre-assessment has been completed and marked, the trainer explains each item and also distinguishes between general language errors and inhouse convention errors.

General language errors are common grammatical errors, which apply outside of Nedbank as well. Inhouse errors are those that would not normally be seen as an error outside of Nedbank, but which are not in accordance with Nedbank's writing conventions, as set out in Chapter 3.

#### **4.4.6 Therapy/remediation of errors**

Therapy of errors is done in the remainder of the course when, amongst others, each different item which was tested in the pre-assessment is discussed and explained.

### **4.5 Summary**

In this chapter the research methodology and analysis of this study have been discussed. In Chapter 5 a detailed account of the results of the error analysis is given, as well as a comparison between the types of errors made by the Coloured Afrikaans speakers of English and the White Afrikaans speakers of English.

## Chapter 5: Results of the error analysis

### 5.1 Introduction

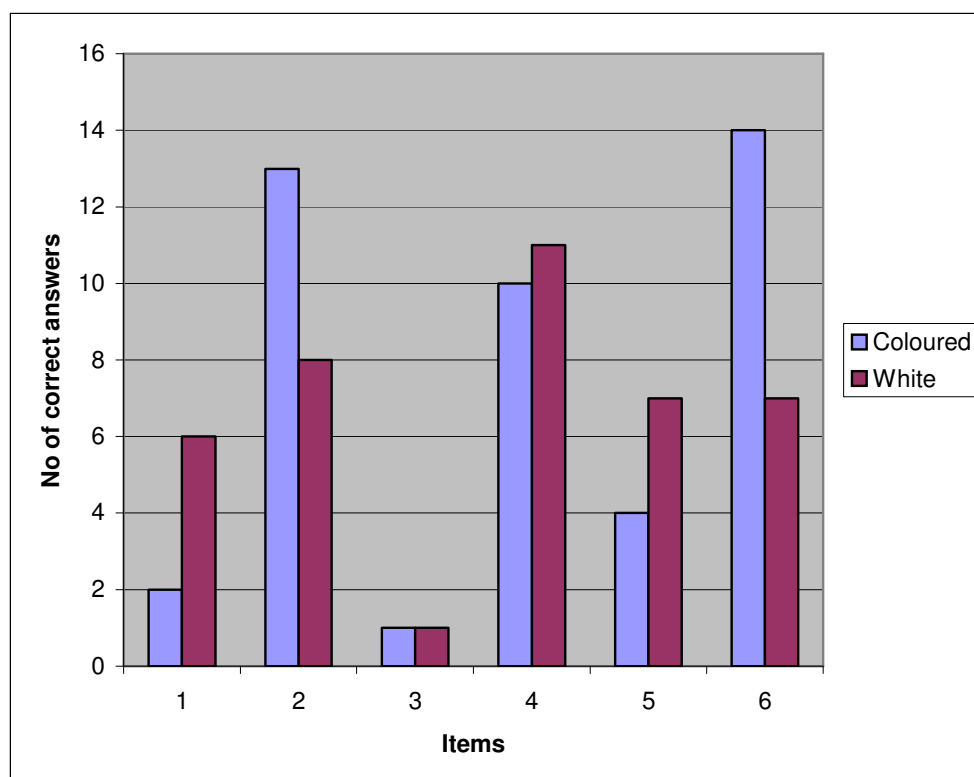
The results of the error analysis are grouped into two main outcomes: results per group and results per question/item.

A division is furthermore made between items dealing with grammatical knowledge – which is acquired knowledge for the most part – and spelling and typographical knowledge – which is consciously learned.

### 5.2 Analysis of errors made in pre-assessment

#### 5.2.1 Results of the first six items of the pre-assessment

The following graph illustrates the comparative results of the first six items of the pre-assessment with the x-axis reflecting the item number and the y-axis the number of delegates who had every item correct. The lilac columns represent the Coloured group and the maroon columns the White group.



### **Item 1 – passive form of past continuous tense**

This item was very poorly answered by Coloured Afrikaans speakers with only two correct answers out of 15. The White Afrikaans speakers did slightly better with six correct answers.

This was a difficult item. Most delegates used the passive, but in the past indefinite form. After tenses and passives were formally discussed during the training, the exercises were dealt with much better by both groups.

### **Item 2 – possessive pronoun *whose***

This item was answered well by the Coloured group (13), but averagely by the White group (8).

Most White speakers (6) made the error of using *who's* instead of *whose*, an item that is specifically dealt with in the training materials.

### **Item 3 – passive past perfect**

This question was answered very poorly by both groups; one each respectively.

Passives are a crucial problem for both cultural groups; only the simple tenses are done correctly. The past perfect tense also poses problems, most probably because there is no similar structure in Afrikaans.

### **Item 4 – spelling of *reimbursed***

Both groups did fairly well on this item. The Coloured group had 10 out of 15 and the White group 11 out of 15.

Although the *re-* prefix is still widely used with a hyphen, the modern tendency (also according to the new edition of the Shorter Oxford Dictionary) is to drop the hyphen. This has also been taken up in Nedbank's inhouse style.



### Item 5 – numeral instead of number above nine written out

The result for the Coloured group was very disappointing (4 out of 15) and that of the White group only slightly better (7 out of 15).

This rule is widely used and the overall result was very surprising to the trainer. During the discussion of this rule, many delegates admitted that they had a “vague recollection” of its existence.

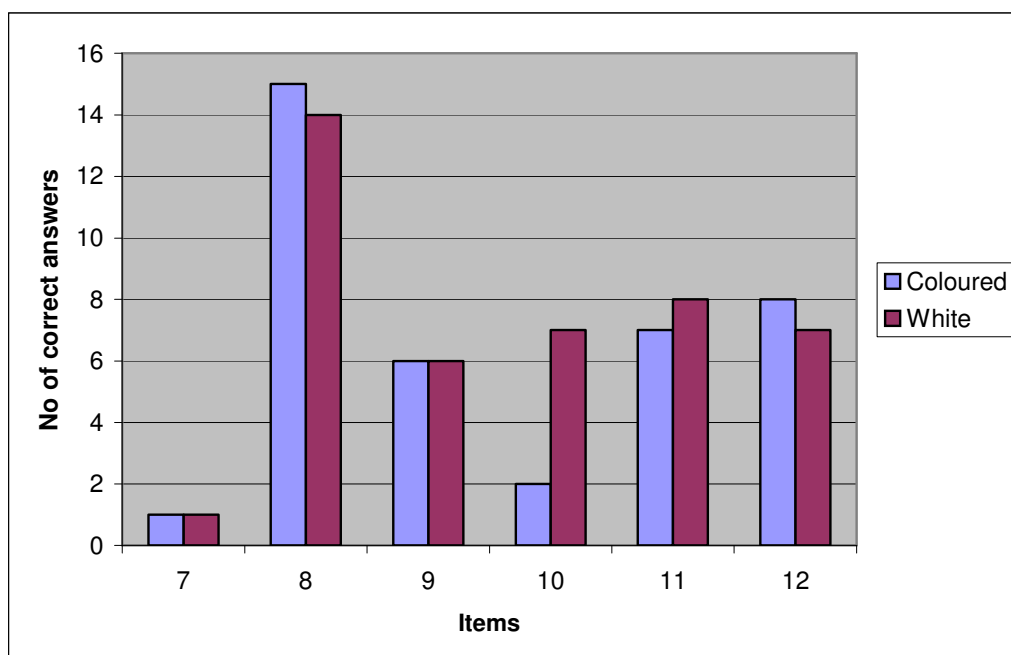
### Item 6 – derivative and spelling of *fraudulent*

The result of the Coloured group was excellent (14 out of 15), but that of the White group was a poor 7 out of 15.

The main error made by the White group was the spelling of the word. Most delegates spelled it *fraudelent*. The structure is therefore present but the spelling not.

## 5.2.2 Results of items 7 – 12

The following graph illustrates the comparative results of items 7 to 12 of the pre-assessment:



### **Item 7 – passive past perfect**

Very poorly answered by both groups with 1 each (see item 3).

### **Item 8 – pronoun *whom***

Excellent answered by both groups. The Coloured group had 15 and the White group 14 out of 15.

The reason for this good result could be because the only bit of information that was divulged before the pre-assessment was a short discussion about the difference between subject and object and its relevance to *who* and *whom*. Otherwise, there are generally few delegates who know the difference between *who* and *whom*.

### **Item 9 – spelling of *cheque***

A poor result for both groups (6 out of 15).

It is alarming, if the banking context is kept in mind, how few Nedbank employees can spot the error of *cheque* spelled as *check*. This item is also specifically dealt with under the comparison between UK and US spelling forms.

### **Item 10 – dangler**

A very poor result for the Coloured group (2 out of 15) and a poor result for the White group (7 out of 15).

Delegates had difficulty in first identifying the problem with putting *As a valued client* and *we* next to each other. It had to be pointed out that it sounds as if Nedbank were the valued client and not "you". More extreme dangles are also used to illustrate the point, for example *Tail waving merrily, Bertie took his dog for a walk.*

### Item 11 – spelling of *socioeconomic*

An average result for both the Coloured group (7 out of 15) and the White group (8 out of 15).

The modern convention regarding the dropped hyphen (see also item 4) is apparently still not widely known.

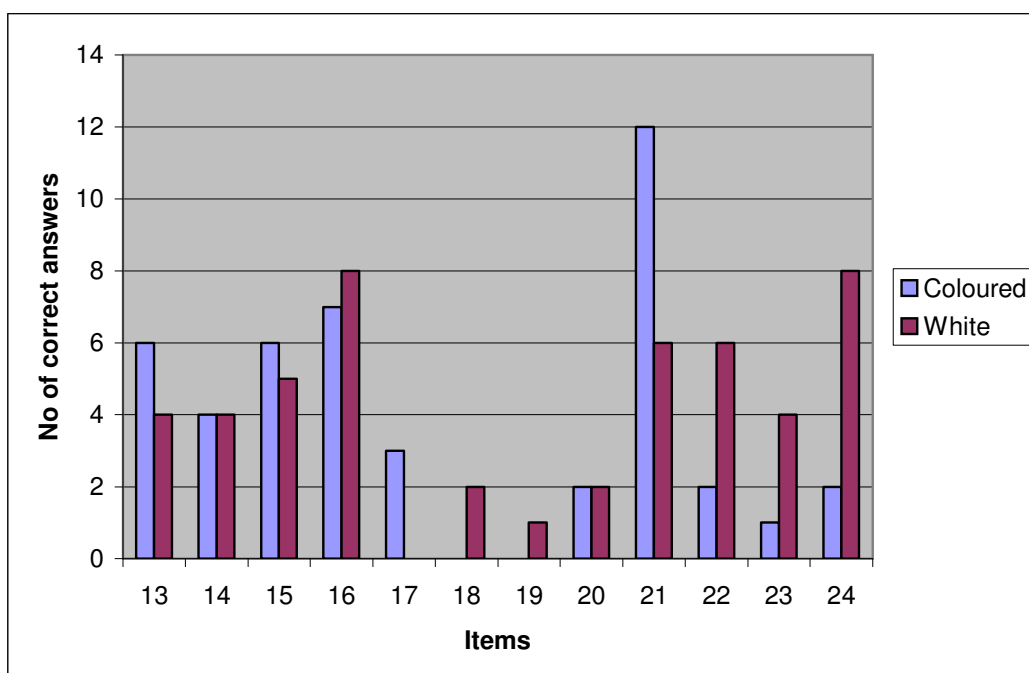
### Item 12 – numeral ‘one’

Average result (Coloured 8 and White 7 out of 15).

The Coloured group did twice as well as on the reverse (item 5) for no obvious reason. The score for the White group stayed the same.

### 5.2.3 Results of items 13 – 24

The following graph illustrates the comparative results of items 13 to 24.



### **Item 13 – defining clause with *that***

Both groups scored poorly. The Coloured group had 6 and the White group 4 out of 15 respectively.

The existence of defining and non-defining clauses and the related correct use of *that* and *which* is a language item that always elicits much response from delegates, with the majority claiming that they have never heard of it. It is not prescribed in the curriculum of English Second/Additional Language at school level and it is therefore quite possible that most second language speakers of English have never been taught the rule previously.

### **Item 14 – deletion of commas when using *that***

Once again poor results were attained by both groups: both the Coloured and the White group had 4 out of 15.

The result of Item 13 has pre-empted this result as the punctuation rule is linked to knowledge of the different clauses.

### **Item 15 – concord with *one of those***

Both groups scored poorly: the Coloured group had 6 and the White group 5 out of 15 respectively.

This rule needs a bit of explanation but is logically governed. At the end of this specific discussion delegates usually master it.

### **Item 16 – concord with *forensics***

Average results were attained by both groups. The Coloured group scored 7 and the White group 8 out of 15.

The apparent plural form ending of *-s* is difficult for most Afrikaans mother tongue speakers to comprehend – regardless of their cultural background as can be seen from this item. Words like *forensics* and *statistics* are usually regarded as outright plural forms by Afrikaans speakers; most probably because of the *-s* suffix generally used to form the plural in English.

### **Item 17 – punctuation with abbreviations**

Very poor results were scored by both groups. The Coloured group scored 3 and the White group 0 out of 15 respectively.

Nedbank's inhouse style prescribes that no punctuation is used with abbreviations, initialisms and acronyms. This is once again aligned with general best practice and also prescribed by the Shorter Oxford Dictionary of English.

It is, however, obvious that Nedbank employees are not necessarily aware of this. This is one of the advantages of this course as group after group are sensitised to these different grammatical and style competencies.

### **Items 18 and 19 – inclusion of *and* when *etc.* is left out.**

Very poor results were scored by both groups; the Coloured group had 0 and 0 out of 15 and the White group 2 and 1 out of 15 respectively.

Apart from the lack of punctuation with abbreviations, the prescriptive rule that *eg* and *etc* are not used in the same sentence is also not widely known with delegates as can be gathered from these results.

### **Item 20 – hyphenation of *load-shedding***

Poor results were attained by both groups; both had 2 out of 15.

Language development is discussed at this point of the course with regard to the eventual joining of two words to form one concept depending on the frequency of use. *Load-shedding* is a fairly novel concept but has quickly become a household word. This led to the fast-tracking of its being written as one. Once again this aspect has no cultural bounds as can be seen from the results.

**Item 21 – *effect vs affect***

Good results for Coloured delegates (12 out of 15) but poor for White delegates (6 out of 15).

The reason for the discrepancy in these results is not quite clear, but after discussion of the difference in meaning between the two words, most delegates had it correct in the post-assessment.

**Item 22 – *dangler***

Poor results were attained by both groups; the Coloured group had 2 out of 15 and the White group 6 (see item 9).

**Item 23 – numeral 10**

Once again poor results were scored by both groups. The Coloured group had 1 and the White group 4 out of 15 respectively (see items 5 and 12).

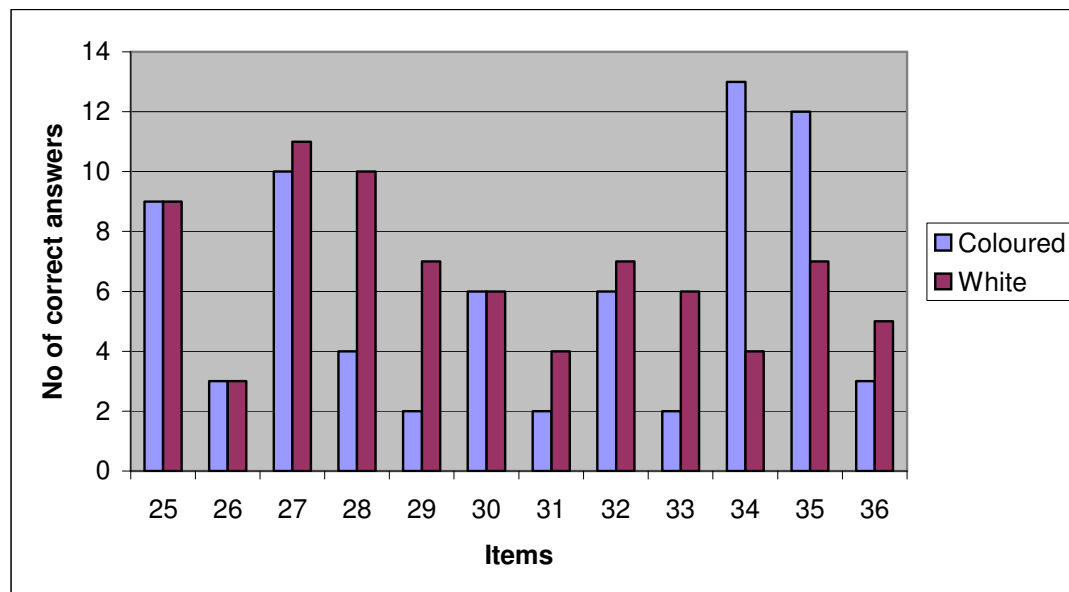
**Item 24 – spelling of *debit card***

A poor result was achieved by the Coloured group (2 out of 15) and an average result by the White group (8 out of 15).

As with the spelling of *cheque* (item 9), it is disconcerting that bank employees do not know the spelling of very basic banking terms. The discrepancy in the results between the two cultural groups is also difficult to explain. Some Coloured delegates said that the tendency to join words with hyphens in many other examples, led them to believe that it was the correct spelling.

### 5.2.4 Results of items 25 to 36

The graph below illustrates the results of items 25 to 36.



#### Items 25 and 28 – conjunction *since*

Fair results for both Coloured and White groups; 9 out of 15 each.

Although the question about the use of the past indefinite tense with the first verb after *since* was answered fairly well, most Coloured delegates admitted that they thought *since* took two simple past tense verbs and that they were not really *au fait* with the rule. The result of item 28 also substantiates this as the Coloured group only scored 4. The White delegates, however, scored 10 for item 28. Most admitted that the rules governing the use of *since*, *after* and *when* were drilled at school level. Whether this is only a 'White' group phenomenon is not clear.

#### Item 26 – punctuation of *CEO*

Very poor result of 3 out of 15 each was achieved by both groups.

This result concurs with that of item 17.

### **Item 27 – spelling of plurals in English with no apostrophe**

Fair result for both the Coloured group (10 out of 15) and the White group (11 out of 15).

This is a higher than expected result as many South African users of English, including mother tongue speakers, tend to use the apostrophe 's for forming plurals. Contrary to this result the exercises done during the discussion of the apostrophe still posed a few problems. What is significant though is the correlation in the result of the different cultural groups.

### **Item 29 – comma splice error**

Poor (Coloured group 2 out of 15) to average result (White group 7 out of 15).

The fairly large discrepancy between the results could be attributed to punctuation rules being drilled in both Afrikaans and English schools in most previously “White” (or so-called Model-C) schools as most of the delegates admitted. The comma splice error also occurs in Afrikaans and is part of the punctuation section of the secondary curriculum for Afrikaans First Language. All the Coloured delegates claimed that they were hardly taught any punctuation rules at school level.

### **Item 30 – plural form of *bonus***

Poor result; both groups attained only 6 out of 15.

Contrary to the result of item 27 delegates did very poorly in the forming of the plural. Many still used the apostrophe form. The reason for the use of the apostrophe to form plurals for both cultural groups is mainly the fact that the apostrophe is used in Afrikaans to form plurals of words ending on stressed vowels – all vowels except the unstressed [a]. In this instance mother tongue interference is most likely the cause of the error.

### **Item 31 – apostrophe use**

Poor result for the Coloured group (4 out of 15) and the White group (2 out of 15).



Once again the use of the apostrophe – in this instance with regard to ownership – posed a problem. This structure does not exist in Afrikaans and could be regarded as “foreign”.

### **Item 32 – use of indefinite article *a/an***

Average result for both the Coloured group (7 out of 15) and the White group (6 out of 15).

The use of *an* before HR is at first glance erroneous for the average second language speaker, as many think the rule is to use *an* before a vowel, not a vowel-like sound. After explanation and discussion most delegates could choose the correct article in the post-assessment.

### **Item 33 – spelling of *programme***

Poor result (Coloured 5 and White 2 out of 15).

After the discussion on the differences between UK and US spelling, most delegates admitted that they were influenced by the US spelling in the media – especially in movies and newspapers. It was made clear during the training that Nedbank adheres to UK spelling and lists of comparisons between UK and US variants were handed out.

### **Item 34 – concord**

Good result (Coloured 11 and White 13 out of 15).

It seems that most delegates (both Coloured and White) know the basic concord rules. However, when dealing with exceptions to the rule many delegates do not get it right in the exercises.

### **Item 35 – concord with *with* structure**

Good result (Coloured 11 and White 12 out of 15).

Once again the concord structures governed by a specific conjunction did not pose too many problems for either group. Both groups claimed that this specific rule was drilled at school.

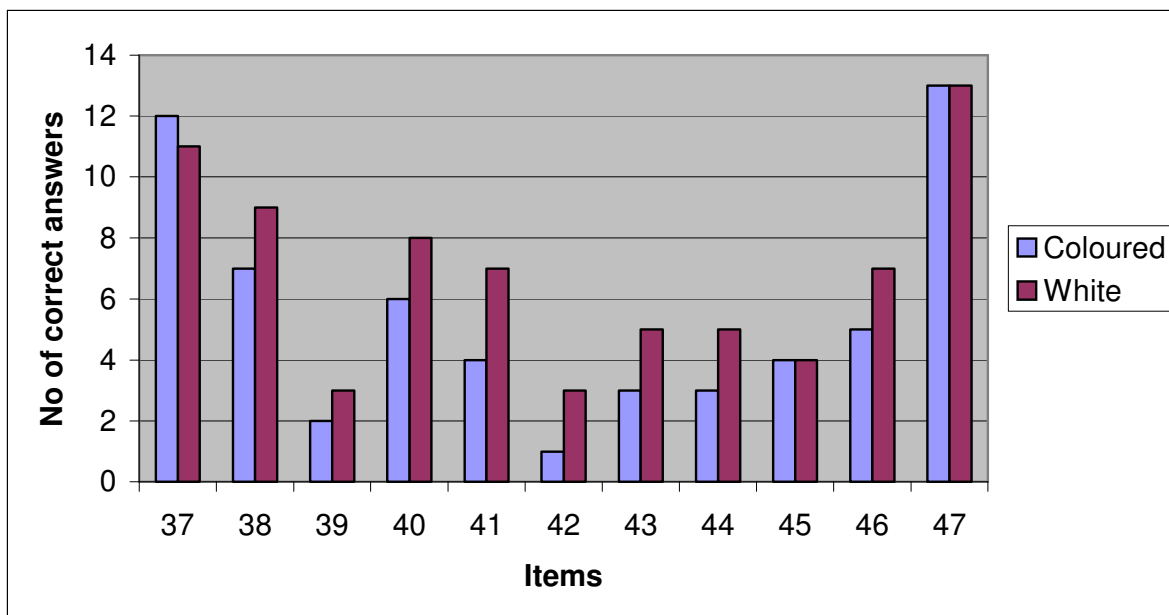
### Item 36 – tense with conjunction *after*

This item showed the greatest discrepancy between the two groups of all items (Coloured 3 and White 11 out of 15).

As with *since* (items 25 and 28), the Coloured group claimed that they were taught that both verbs should be in the simple past tense and that the use of the perfect tenses remained a mystery to them. After the discussion on the perfect tenses, though, most delegates could do the manipulation correctly.

### 5.2.5 Results of items 37 to 47

The graph below shows the results of items 37 to 47.



### **Item 37 – second verb of *after* structure**

Good result for both groups (the Coloured group 12 out of 15 and the White group 11 out of 15).

Once again the simple past tense verb posed little problems for most delegates (see item 25).

### **Item 38 – spelling of *colleagues***

Relatively poor to average result (the Coloured group achieved 7 out of 15 and the White group 9 out of 15).

Many delegates ascribed the error to confusing 'q' with 'g' when typing or writing, and claimed that it is not a bona fide spelling error. However, it is not acceptable usage and should be dealt with meticulously.

### **Items 39 and 40 – *driving licence***

Poor to average results were achieved. For the *driving* part the results were very poor (the Coloured group had 2 out of 15 and the White group 3 out of 15) and for the spelling of *licence* the result of the Coloured group was 6 and that of the White group 8 out of 15.

Very few delegates were convinced that it was in actual fact a driving licence and not a driver's licence. They were instructed to take out their official driving licences – only the spelling on the document eventually convinced them.

Insofar as the spelling of the noun *licence* was concerned the result was slightly better but still not good. The discussion on UK versus US English illuminated the difference and most delegates had it correct in the post-assessment.

#### **Item 41 – capitalising of *Legal***

Results achieved were poor to average (the Coloured group had 4 out of 15 and the White group 7 out of 15).

The capitalising of the word *legal*, because it is the name of a division, is to a great extent an inhouse stylistic norm – a norm few Nedbank employees are apparently aware of. In the editing exercise given at the end of the first day, this item is once again assessed – usually with greater success.

#### **Items 42 and 43 – use of the past perfect tense with the conjunction *before***

The result for the past perfect tense manipulation was once again disappointing (the Coloured group attained 1 out of 15 and the White group 3 out of 15); similarly for the main verb part (the Coloured group attained 3 out of 15 and the White group 5 out of 15).

With the other two similar items (items 1 and 17), the result of the White group was more on par, but the reversed word order apparently complicated the structure a bit for the delegates.

Generally, the concept of a further past tense (the past perfect tense) is very difficult to understand for Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers as there is nothing that closely resembles any such structure in Afrikaans.

Furthermore, the verb form of *practice* was tested (*practised*) and as indicated few had it right – fewer than with *licence*, which follows a similar pattern.

#### **Item 44 – *clients* instead of *customers***

Poor results were achieved by both groups (the Coloured group achieved 3 and the White group 5 out of 15).

The whole concept of a bank having clients and not customers is stressed through all Nedbank's external communications. However, it seems as if the

majority of the Nedbank employees are not aware of this. There is no significant discrepancy between the results of the two groups.

#### **Item 45 – identity document**

Poor results were achieved by both groups (4 out of 15).

The repetition of *document* in the phrase *ID document* is more a question of logic than one of grammar. After it is explained in as many words, delegates usually wonder how they could have not noticed it in the past. No clear discrepancy between the two groups.

#### **Item 46 – use of the ampersand**

Poor results were achieved by both groups (the Coloured group 5 out of 15 and the White group 7 out of 15).

This is an inhouse stylistic decision – ampersands are not used; *and* is written out in full. Once again delegates had to be made aware of this decision; most of them did not know about it. There was no clear discrepancy between the two cultural groups.

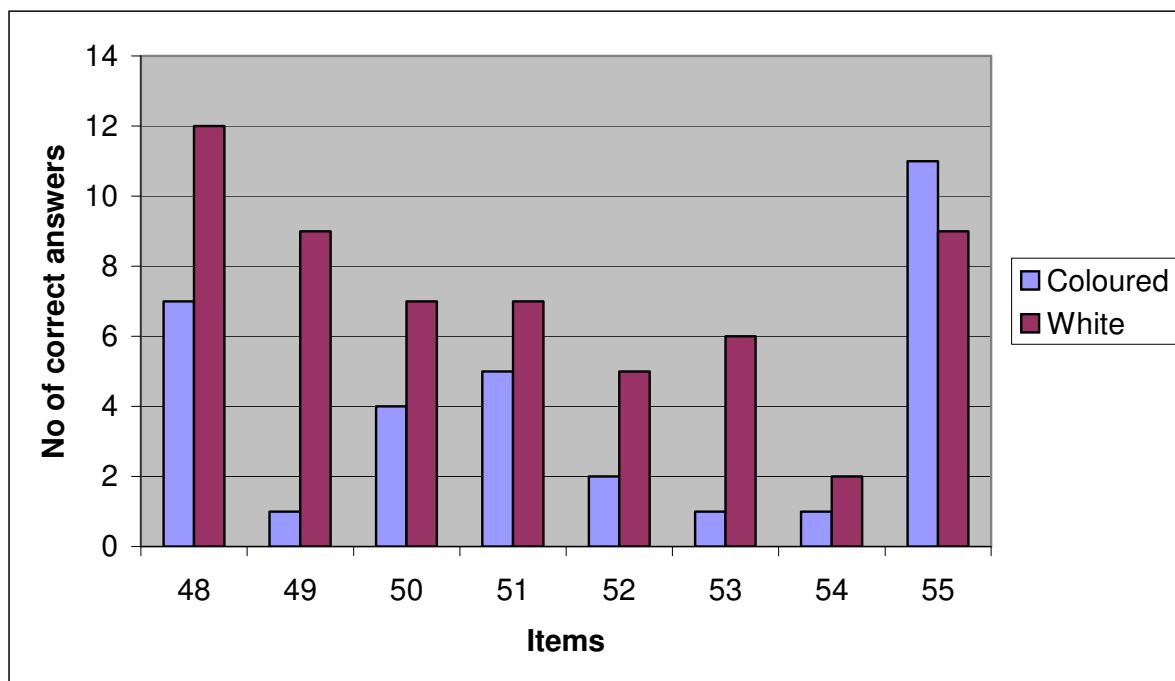
#### **Item 47 – concord: name of a division**

Good results were achieved (both groups had 13 out of 15).

Divisional names like *Mergers and Acquisitions* seem to be engrained as a single concept in the consciousness of delegates and few had it incorrect.

### 5.2.6 Results of items 48 to 55

The graph below illustrates the results of items 48 to 55.



#### Item 48 – use of apostrophe to indicate ownership

A poor result was achieved by the Coloured group (7 out of 15) and a good result by the White group (12 out of 15).

Once again the use of the apostrophe posed problems for the Coloured group (compare item 14). The different possessive structure used in Afrikaans could be the cause of this. Surprisingly, though, the White group this time around fared very well. According to the delegates the use of the proper noun (Nedbank) made it easier to detect the error.

#### Item 49 – capitalisation of name of publication

A poor result was achieved by the Coloured group (1 out of 15) but a fair result by the White group (9 out of 15).

The reason for this big discrepancy between the results of the two groups is not clear. One coloured delegate suggested that it could be because, especially in the past, members of the White Afrikaans-speaking community had a more frequent exposure to media, specifically to publications. The validity of this statement, however, has not been tested and therefore it cannot be used as a probable reason for the purposes of this study.

#### **Item 50 – spelling of *worldclass***

Poor result for Coloured group (4 out of 15) but average for White (7 out of 15).

In Nedbank's spelling list *worldclass* is given as one word. However, within the bank it has led to much controversy as all role-players do not agree about it. The bank's "World-class Service" campaign has been registered with a hyphen and is used as such. In all other documentation it is spelled as one word.

This should be seen as an inhouse style item and not an indicator of general language proficiency. It is, however, disconcerting to notice how few delegates are actually aware of the Nedbank way of doing things linguistically.

Most of the White delegates who had it right were actually involved with the campaign and knew of the dispute surrounding it. That is most probably the main reason for the discrepancy between the two groups.

#### **Item 51 – comma before *which***

Results were poor to average (the Coloured group had 5 out of 15 and the White group 7 out of 15).

Once again ignorance about non-defining clauses would lead to delegates not knowing of the punctuation convention regarding *which* (see item 13). No marked discrepancy in the results of the different groups.

### **Item 52 – difference between *award* and *reward***

The results were poor (the Coloured group had 2 out of 15 and the White group 5 out of 15).

This item was illuminated in the “Words often confused” section. In the post-assessment the results were markedly better. No significance in the results of the different groups.

### **Item 53 – punctuation with abbreviations**

Results were poor (the Coloured group had 1 out of 15) to average (the White group had 6 out of 15).

These results were the reverse of item 17 where the Coloured group did better; therefore, there appears to be no differences in the pattern of punctuation usage between the two groups.

### **Item 54 – capitalising of job title**

Results were very poor (the Coloured group had 1 out of 15 and the White group 2 out of 15).

Once again use of capital letters and punctuation is not on par in the Nedbank workforce. However, after the discussion during the training, most delegates could effortlessly apply the rules.

### **Item 55 – punctuation in respect of job title**

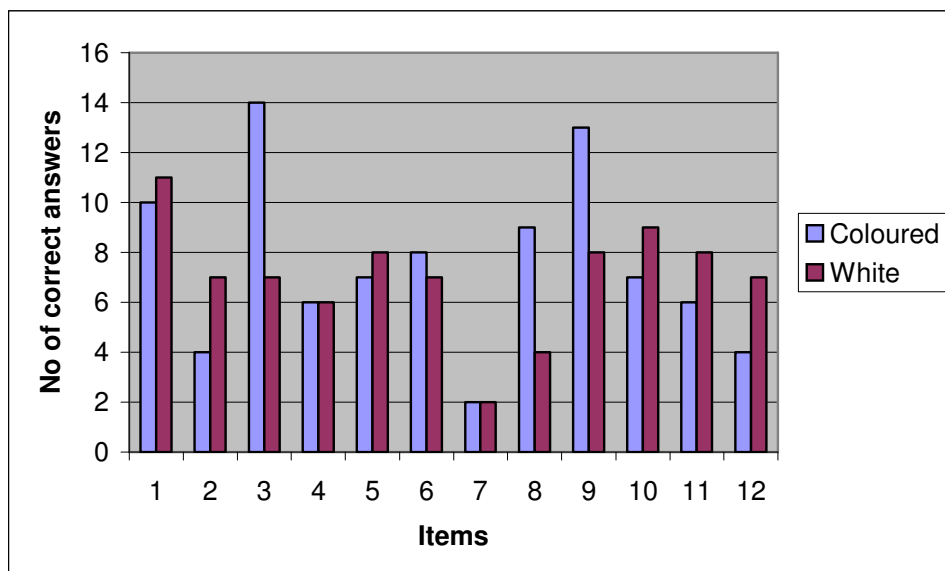
Results were average to fair (the Coloured group had 11 out of 15 and the White group 9 out of 15).

According to the results most delegates are aware of the commas flanking a job title. No marked discrepancy between the different groups.



### 5.2.7 Item analysis with regard to items testing spelling and typographical knowledge

Out of the 55 items 12 are typographical/spelling items. Of these 12 items the results of the respective groups look as follows:

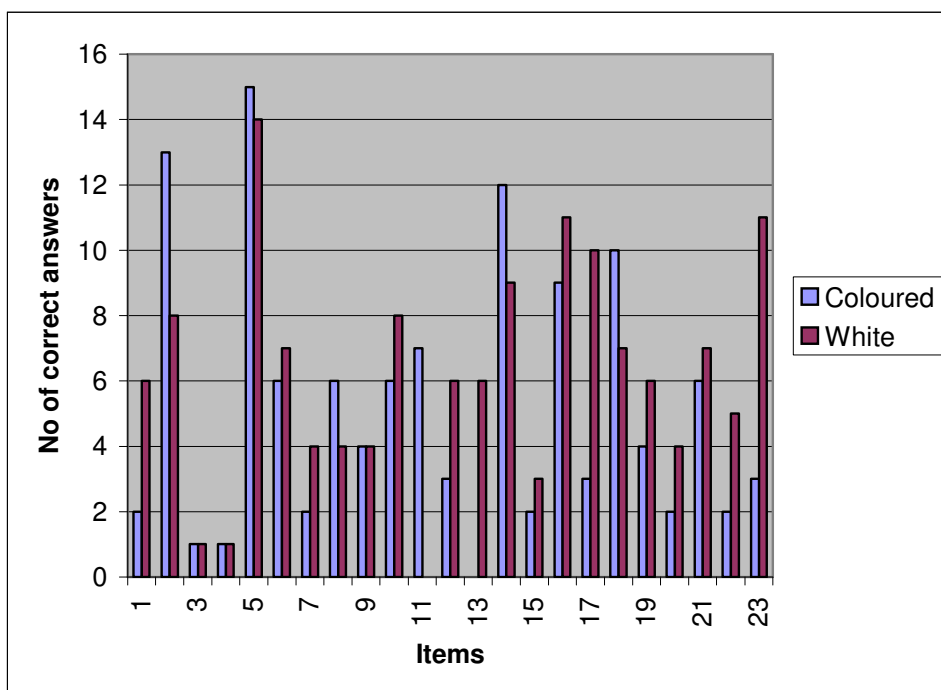


No pattern emerges in the results of these. In some items the Coloured group did better (4 items) and in others the White group (6 items) beat them. In two items the result was exactly the same.

In conclusion it can, therefore, be said that the differences with regard to individual items were marked, but the overall results for the two groups were very close to each other.

### 5.2.8 Item analysis with regard to items testing grammatical knowledge

The remaining 43 items test grammatical knowledge and the majority of the items were done best by the White group. The reason for the better performance by the White group could be attributed to better school education, especially during the Apartheid era where there were big discrepancies in quality of schooling between the different race groups. Another possibility could be higher exposure to good English writing in generally more privileged circumstances, both at school and at home.



### 5.3 Conclusion

The above results of the error analysis highlight several significant aspects that need to be remedied in order to improve the standard of English usage of Nedbank employees in general. In Chapter 5 some recommendations are put forward on how to remedy the situation, and further related research topics are suggested.

## Chapter 6: Recommendations and conclusion

### 6.1 Introduction

The item and error analyses in Chapters 3 and 4 examined all the responses and errors made by the two groups of delegates. Furthermore, certain possible reasons for the errors in question were suggested.

In this chapter, we address the two research questions stated in 1.4, namely (i) the question concerning the nature of the errors in English language usage made by the two cultural groups and (ii) the question how to adapt the training materials to be more accommodating.

### 6.2 Discrepancies in language usage between the two cultural groups as manifested in the error analysis

The most important conclusions that can be drawn from the error analysis in the comparison of the results of the two cultural groups are as follows:

- i. There is a marked difference in the average of language items correctly answered between the two groups. The Coloured average was 54% and the White average was 69%.
- ii. The most apparent difference between the two groups is the handling of tenses in all the items related to tense usage with conjunctions like *since*, *after* and *before*.
- iii. The above difference is not a matter of mother tongue interference – most delegates who had those items correct claimed that they still remembered it from their school days. Therefore, most discrepancies could be attributed to good schooling or the lack thereof.
- iv. The most obvious case of mother tongue interference was the same for both groups – the use of the apostrophe for the forming of plurals in English. The fact that mother tongue interference comes into play

at the same items for both groups is predictable as the two groups have the same mother tongue.

- v. The results of similar items, like the use of punctuation in abbreviations, initialisms and acronyms and the manipulation of verbs into the perfect tenses, correlated for both groups respectively. In short, there is a consistency in the making of errors by both groups, which could be a positive sign. When the one error is remedied, other similar errors could be corrected automatically.
- vi. What is significant is the fact that the language usage of written English is below par for both groups, regardless of what is at the root of a problem. This needs to be remedied by means of expansion of the courses, which can be done in different ways.

### **6.3 Recommendations for the adaptation of training materials to remedy the errors identified**

To enhance the contribution of the training materials to improving English language usage of Nedbank employees the following need to be done:

- i. The Basic Business Writing course needs to be expanded to a three-day course; currently it covers two days. This will give more time to elaborate on specific items that particular delegates find problematic. This can be done on a one-on-one basis with each delegate, while the rest continue with additional editing exercises on the third day.
- ii. More time should be allocated to the completion of the post-assessment, which could also be expanded to the length of the pre-assessment. More elaborate feedback could then be given on the results of the post-assessment.
- iii. For the two cultural groups dealt with in this study, more time needs to be allocated to the discussion and assessing of the following items, since the results for these aspects were extremely poor and possible mother tongue interference seems to be at its most obvious with these:

- Passives
  - Use of the past perfect tense
  - Spelling – especially in the case of words that are spelled with or without hyphens
  - Punctuation, especially the use of the apostrophe
  - Defining and non-defining clauses
  - Spelling lists of bank-related concepts like ‘debit card’ and ‘cheque’
  - Expanded lists on Nedbank inhouse style items
  - More attention to the avoidance of dangles
- iv. For the two groups in question there need not be separate courses developed as their mother tongue is the same and no clear pattern emerges in specific errors made by the two groups.

## **6.4 Possible topics for further research**

A second study is already underway to establish differences between the English language usage of Afrikaans-speaking employees compared with that of Indian mother tongue speakers of English and where real discrepancies have already emerged. However, in concurrent research where a similar error analysis is done for Afrikaans mother tongue speakers on the one hand and Indian English mother tongue speakers on the other, such vast discrepancies in language usage are emerging that the course will need to be customised for the latter group.

Similar studies will be done in collaboration with those members of NELs who are mother tongue speakers of each of the other official languages of South Africa. This study should only be seen as a starting point to accommodate and enhance the rich language diversity of our country and to improve the language usage skills of Nedbank employees.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This study is only a first step towards improving intercultural communication within a banking context by sensitising trainers to possible mother tongue interference, a legacy of poor schooling and cultural traditions that may impact on the usage of English by non-mother tongue users.

The two groups dealt with in this study, Coloured speakers of English whose mother tongue is Afrikaans, and White speakers of English whose mother tongue is Afrikaans, are but two of the cultural groups accommodated in the Business Writing courses. Further research will also be done on the performance of Indian speakers of English; White English first language speakers; Portuguese mother tongue speakers of English, and separate studies of all the nine African language mother tongue speakers of English.

It is a positive sign that the errors made by the two groups in this study can be addressed by a single set of training materials and that there should only be a slight shift in emphasis on certain aspects that are problematic. The real challenge lies with the accommodation of all the different language groups on one course and with one set of training materials.

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